

Peter Stone Brown

The Joker and the Thief

Foreword

Peter Stone Brown (1951-2019) was a freelance writer, singer-songwriter and renowned Dylanologist. His rootsy debut album *Up Against It* was recorded in the Austin studio of childhood friend Ray Benson of *Asleep at the Wheel*. Debuting on the Americana charts in 1996, it featured many legendary Austin session players including Cindy Cashdollar who would play on Bob Dylan's *Time out of Mind* the following year.

Peter was a DJ at WXPB in the '70s where he interviewed many of the blues, folk and country greats, including Muddy Waters, Fats Domino, John Lee Hooker, Dr John, Carl Perkins, George Jones and James Brown. Later he was a rock critic at The Welcomat, Philadelphia's alternative newspaper and predecessor of the Philadelphia Weekly, through the '80s and '90s.

In David A. Kinney's book *The Dylanologists: Adventures in the land of Bob*, Peter describes how after a few sessions with a psychiatrist as a teenager, he finally brought in a copy of Bringing It All Back Home, dropped the needle on It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding) and said to the doctor, "this is how I feel". That feeling, passion and deep sense of how things are permeated his life, his writing, reading, music, and politics.

Peter saw his first Bob Dylan concert in Newark New Jersey at the Mosque Theatre on November 30th 1963, after a summer of discovering the music of Dylan watching Pete Seeger. This sparked a love for Bob Dylan that would find him attending nearly 200 concerts spanning 1963 to 2018. He witnessed Dylan in transition over almost all of his career, attending fabled shows like Philharmonic Hall in 1964, electric Dylan at Forest Hills in August 1965 through tour '74, the Rolling Thunder Revue, the Gospel shows and up through the Never Ending Tour. His last concert would land where his first concert began, New Jersey in November 2018 at the Etess Arena in Atlantic City.

In recent years Peter continued playing concerts and writing on Bob Dylan, chronicling the Never Ending Tour and becoming a familiar commentator among the Dylan online community. Over the years he has contributed to Bobydylan.com, American Songwriter, CounterPunch and No Depression.

In 2008 Jeff Rosen commissioned Peter to write liner notes for Bob Dylan's Tell Tale Signs, he spent about a week listening to tracks sent by Dylan's office, suggesting songs and writing as he listened. In the end his notes didn't make the final release but were posted on Bobdylan.com.

For more than twenty years Peter spoke of writing a book about Bob Dylan called The Joker and the Thief. He'd drafted various outlines of how it would go, spoken to numerous friends over the years about it, but he kept getting pulled into other work.

Fortunately much of what has become his body of work on Dylan, from concert and album reviews to prose pieces, cover many of the ideas Peter had for the book and are contained herein.

In 2018 Peter was diagnosed with a form of pancreatic cancer. Right around that time rumours surfaced about the impending release of More Blood, More Tracks: The Bootleg Series Vol. 14. This release was something Peter had waited a lifetime for. His brother Tony Brown is the bass player on the New York Sessions for Blood on the Tracks, and so the album was embedded mythologically and deeply in Peter's emotional life.

Peter would make it into 2019 long enough to see Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story, and some glimpses of The Bootleg Series Vol. 15: Travelin' Thru, 1967-1969

but unfortunately would not write about either. Peter died on October 5th 2019. He missed the incredible US Fall 2019 Tour by a matter of weeks, he missed Murder Most Foul and he missed Rough and Rowdy Ways.

This collection aims to fulfil Peter's life's work in Bob Dylan writing, it's a loving tribute to a friend and a completion of something he always strived to do.

Trev Gibb
February 2021

Thanks

I'd like to express my gratitude and thanks to the following individuals for their support, advice and suggestions when I decided I would try to put together a collection of Peter's work for publication. My great thanks and love to Tony Brown, Babette Holland, Seth Kulick, Michael Simmons, Jeff Rosen, Michael Vogelmann, Dan Montgomery, David Lee Preston and Jon Perlmutter.

Thanks also to Karl Erik Andersen for always supporting Peter's work through his website www.expectingrain.com

Contents

The chapters consist of articles for Bob Dylan.com and other publications. They include album reviews, other releases and prose pieces. They're arranged chronologically with Dylan's career so they flow from year to year.

1. Introduction
2. A Bob Dylan Timeline
3. A Young Man with An Old Man's Voice
4. You Only Had to Feel Them
5. 50th Anniversary Thoughts on My First Dylan Concert
6. Another Side of Bob Dylan at 50
7. Halloween at Philharmonic Hall
8. Dylan's Myth Busting Cutting Edge
9. Highway 61 Revisited, revisited
10. Bob Dylan at Forest Hills
11. Reviving a Memory - Symphony Hall October 2nd 1965
12. Who wrote "Blowin' in the Wind"? Not Lorre Wyatt
13. Obviously '60s Revisited
14. Down in the Basement, but out of the Vault
15. The Banks of the Royal Canal
16. Is John Wesley Harding Dylan's Greatest Album?
17. Dear Mrs Roosevelt
18. Wild Mountain Thyme
19. Looking Back on Nashville Skyline
20. 40 Years of Self Portrait
21. The Redefinition of Bob Dylan's Self Portrait
22. Reflections on Tour '74
23. More Blood, More Tracks
24. From a Rolling Thunder to a Hard Rain
25. Street Legal at 40
26. Dylan's Gospel Revisited
27. Was 1981 The Last Really Great Tour?
28. Infidels - Return of the Tambourine Man
29. Real Live
30. Empire Burlesque
31. Biograph
32. Knocked out Loaded
33. Down in the Groove
34. Oh Mercy - Dylan's triumph

- 35.The Grandfather Dylan and the World Gone Mad
- 36.Bodacious New Dylan Collection - The Bootleg Series, Volumes 1 -3
- 37.Good As I Been To You
- 38.World Gone Wrong
- 39.Looking Back on Time out of Mind
- 40.Love And Theft
- 41.Madison Square Garden 2001
- 42.Dylan at Newport 2002
- 43.Masked and Anonymous
- 44.Dylan's Swing-Time Waltz in the Face of the Apocalypse
- 45.The Re-packaging of Bob Dylan - Dylan 2007
- 46.The Liner Notes for Tell Tale Signs
- 47.Together Through Life
- 48.It's a Bob Dylan Christmas for Halloween
- 49.Bob Dylan and America
- 50.Dylan's Sly Trip to Hell on Earth
- 51.Shadows of Dylan Standard Time
- 52.Doing it His Way: Bob Dylan and the Great American Songbook Revisited
- 53.Reaching Back for Yesterday
- 54.The Strange Sad Tale of Victor Maymudes
- 55.The NET - Learning to Lead a Band
- 56.Last thoughts on Bob Dylan

Introduction

Peter spoke to me at length about Bob Dylan one night in May 2019.

What Bob Dylan has is people-fright and fame-fright. As for Performing, he loves it. What he didn't like was all the other shit that came with it, and it freaked him out big time. The tragedy of Bob Dylan is that when he got the fame he craved, he gave up having any kind of normal life forever. And he wasn't prepared for that. He was way too sensitive, way too into his own privacy. All he wanted to be was a singer and a songwriter, but because he turned out to be a songwriting genius (and a singing genius) he got deep, deep into people's minds and souls. And because he had this intensity and this amazing ability to perceive and put that perception into his writing, sending him leaps and bounds ahead of everyone else (and he probably doesn't have a clue as to where that gift came from), it put him into this whole other position, this whole other thing he wasn't prepared for and couldn't handle, and there was no one around to help him handle it either.

Because of that he could no longer do the things he liked to do and wanted to do offstage because everywhere he went people were gawking, as he says, he'd walk into a room and the room would immediately change. He could no longer be him. And that is the real story of Bob Dylan.

I've always felt that Larry 'Ratso' Sloman came the closest to letting you know what Dylan may be like.

The reason I always wanted to write a book about Bob Dylan is it's not just that he's a brilliant songwriter, but that he's also a great, great singer. In terms of songwriting he's written all kinds of songs, he's written songs that have come from deep within and he's also written songs that haven't come from deep within. But I wanted to really write about the music.

I discovered Bob Dylan when I was 12, when I saw Pete Seeger sing "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" and "Who Killed Davey Moore" in concert at the beginning of the summer of '63. I went away to camp and I didn't really pay attention to who he said wrote the songs. That summer "Blowin' in the Wind" by Peter, Paul and Mary was a huge hit, they played it on AM radio all the time but they never said who had written it they just played the songs.

And then I got home. My family had moved from the city to a small town in New Jersey and my brother came back from a different camp and a camp where a lot of people were into folk music because it was a left-wing camp and he told me about this guy named Bob Dylan who was following in the path of Woody Guthrie. We had both grown up listening to folk music. Our parents didn't have many records, they had a couple of records, but I knew who Woody Guthrie was, I didn't have to find out who Woody Guthrie was through Bob Dylan, I came from the other direction.

My brother played "Don't Think Twice, It's Alright" on the guitar and then over the summer he learned to play the harmonica and he had a harmonica holder and either that very night or the next night Dylan was on TV, the educational station, on this show about freedom songs and he sang "Only A Pawn In Their Game" and "Blowin' In The Wind", and he looked to me just like Woody Guthrie. Then we got The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan and I was listening to that and of course songs like "Masters of War" but also songs like "Corrina, Corrina" and even "Bob Dylan's Blues". When he sang 'the Lone Ranger and Tonto came riding down the line fixing everybody's troubles, everybody's but mine', I thought that was pretty fucking funny.

That November we saw him at the Mosque Theatre in New Jersey, it wasn't anywhere near sold out. We had seats in the balcony and in the second half we moved up to the 10th or 8th row, we were terrified because we were kids. We didn't do that at concerts, but nobody was sitting there and we didn't get bothered. He sang some song songs off The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan, and there had been an article on him in Newsweek magazine that came out maybe a couple weeks before the show which said he didn't write "Blowin' In The Wind",

that a kid in a New Jersey town did had written it, and it also had that Dylan's name wasn't really Dylan it was Bob Zimmerman.

At the show when he sang "Blowin' in the Wind", he said "here's the song Newsweek said I didn't write". He did a lot of songs I didn't know at the show, like "Talkin' John Birch Society Blues", he usually did a couple of talking blues, "The Walls of Red Wing", he may even have done "Restless Farewell", and "Who Killed Davey Moore" and "The Times They Are A Changin" and "Hollis Brown". Hollis Brown was set to the music of this old ballad called "Pretty Polly" and I knew that the first time I saw him sing it because I had a record of Pete Seeger singing "Pretty Polly". But that didn't bother me because I knew that's how folk music worked.

Two months later that January I walked into a record store and was looking through the records and there was The Times They Are A Changin and I just went boing! It was probably my first instant buy if not the first album I bought myself. And I took it home and it was on the turntable a lot for the next six months and that song "The Times They Are A Changin", I mean when it had that verse about 'come mothers and fathers throughout the whole land don't criticize what you can't understand' that was pretty much it for me, I was like 'oh my god, this guy's saying what I'm thinking'. With songs like "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" and "With God On Our Side" - in fact, With God On Our Side was the encore at the concert in Newark - really kicked it off for me.

I was a kid and for me he was the perfect hero who showed up at just the right time. And his gift was that somehow he managed to say what I was feeling and the remarkable thing is that he still often says what I am feeling. And when you get down to it, that's the important thing, for me anyway.

But Dylan didn't perform all that much back then once he got out of the Village coffeehouses. A concert a year basically in each town (the one exception being the fall of '65 in NYC anyway). But back then you went to a Bob Dylan concert not only to see him, but to hear what he had to say and he delivered. He was loose then and freer and funnier in a more open way. People would shout out questions and requests and he would answer directly, not just look at them strangely or something, and that original looseness is only starting to come back in the past few years though it has appeared from time to time most notably in the first Rolling Thunder Tour. But back then it wasn't all wrapped up in myth and almost 40 years of fun and games.

These days it's kind of like well which song that I've been wanting to hear forever will he pull out, and will he pull it out at the show or show I go to, and if he does pull it out will it be great or will it just be a run through, or will it be unrecognizeable, and then, will it be unrecognizeably amazing or unrecognizeably ridiculous, and will I change my mind a month or two later when I hear the tape or maybe a year later when I hear some other version done a million miles away. So it's a different game and a different atmosphere.

Back then when he did one of his epic songs whether Desolation Row or It's Alright Ma, he did the whole song. Now he doesn't and sometimes, especially when you're at the show, you might be too wrapped up in the performance to even notice or care, and at other times I might say, he only did 3 verses, it was still just as long, but 10 minutes of it was guitar noodling and when the guitar noodling turns into guitar playing and goes somewhere then I don't care, but when it doesn't, I think damn it would've been nice if he sang a few more verses instead of playing the same 3 notes for 10 minutes.

But even those shows - and I've seen my share of them - never stopped me from going again the next time because you never know what he's gonna do and there's very few performers you can say that about and he never sings a song the same way twice, period. And it's that aspect that keeps me coming back and I've been coming back for more of my life than not. But I will say this, it's a shame that the Bob fans who've come on board whether due to their age or whatever have rarely gotten a chance to see him perform alone, one man with a guitar and a harp because there was nothing like it, and you had to be there, because whatever exists on film or video only gives a hint of what it was really like.

Dylan did not just stumble onto the folk scene either. He was introduced to it and turned on to it (according to books and legends) at University of Minnesota. And he got totally into it, and not the wimpy shit either. Many people who knew him back then commented on how he soaked up influences like a sponge. And so he explored blues, and American, English and Scottish traditional music. Learning, borrowing and stealing. Also, Woody Guthrie's music was never to be discounted. Guthrie showed him what could be written about in a song and the Beat and symbolist poets widened that. What Dylan already had growing up was the rock 'n' roll, country and R&B he heard late at night on the radio. That was his ace in the hole and he was smart enough (he may be from a hick town, but he is smart) to sort of keep it hidden (though his first album is rock 'n' roll disguised as folk) until he could make his move.

Looking back, it's easy to see it was something he had to do. Remaining a folk singer was simply too artistically confining. To me, one of his greatest accomplishments is that he did mix it all up and confused a lot of people in the process.

When I first saw Dylan in the 60s especially at the Halloween show at Philharmonic Hall, he was hysterical. He was really funny and as his writing progressed and he got into the symbolist poets like Rimbaud and his songs got more obscure people started taking him way too seriously. Not that he didn't deserve to be taken seriously but they elevated him to such a height that they missed the things that were funny. 'Desolation Row' is hysterical and the first time he sang it, which I saw, at Forest Hills Stadium in 1965, when he goes "one

hand is tied to the tightrope walker the other is in his pants', the audience laughed hysterically and he delivered it with comic timing.

Twenty years later people would come along who weren't around at the time and everything became this irreverent thing, but a lot of the time Dylan is just kidding. There's even lines in *Brownsville Girl* which are hysterical like, "the only thing we knew about Henry Porter was that his name wasn't Henry Porter."

I hesitate putting Bob Dylan into categories, even obvious ones such as early Dylan, because even then it starts getting into how early. He went through such remarkable growth and changes, from the early ballads and topical songs of *The Times They Are A Changin'* to the surrealist epics. There was a definite change in the post-*Blonde on Blonde* songs and with that change came periods of extreme highs and also periods of lows, followed again by periods of highs. But can we expect any artist who's had a career that is stretching closer and closer towards 70 years to be consistently great? As great and trailblazing as the albums through 1966 are, there is something else happening on the later albums, something that can't necessarily be defined and sometimes may go even deeper than the most classic songs of '65-'66. And while it may be a longer wait at times for the highs, and sometimes the real highs may be kept out of sight for a while like "Abandoned Love" and "Blind Willie McTell," I've never viewed Dylan as an artist in decline. I prefer to view him as an artist continuing.

I've maintained for years that Bob Dylan is out of his mind, just fucking crazy. Every time someone asks what is the best Bob Dylan book, I always say *Ratso's On The Road With Bob Dylan*, because it's the only one that gives a clue of what he's like as a person and also because it's hysterically funny. Who else would have the chutzpah to ask him, "Is eyes on Sad Eyed Lady a noun or a verb?"

No other performer fucks with his fans like Bob Dylan. When Suze Rotolo wrote her book, I'd hoped she would do a little book tour with readings but even if it had just been a signing, I would have gone. And what I would have said to her, after telling her that I went to Camp Kinderland (which would have immediately let her know where I was coming from) was to ask if Bob ever said how much he liked Barry Goldwater, because on one level I've always wondered whether the Goldwater statement in *Chronicles Vol I* is just that, fucking with his fans. What I do know is it's not just his fans he fucks with, it's his friends as well and sometimes it's just hysterical. I think it's a thing he got into when he was really young and he just could never stop doing it. My two favourite examples are Dave Van Ronk telling him to read Rimbaud, Dylan responding with an idiotic "Huh!?", and Van Ronk going to his apartment, finding a copy of Rimbaud's *Complete Works* with handwritten annotations in the margins. Then ten years later Lowell George meets Dylan and George asks, "Do you ever listen to Jackson Browne?", receives an answer along the lines of who's that, then is invited to Dylan's house the same day, and is in the room with Dylan's albums and while Dylan goes out of the room to take a phone call, he checks out Bob's record collection and it includes every Jackson Browne album out at the time.

I always wanted to do the one interview no one ever did with Bob, the music interview. No one ever asks him (this was when he was still playing) about guitars and clearly he has a lot of guitars. No one talks about the changes in his harp style. When he started all the music critics like Robert Shelton talked about Woody and Sonny Terry in terms of harp, but I realized about 20 or 30 years ago, the guy who really influenced him on harp was Jimmy Reed.

I've seen him over 140 times and really don't need to see him again. My attitude despite a million reviews of Never Ending Tour shows is I saw him from a front row center seat with Levon & The Hawks in 1965. Do you think it's gonna get better than that? Not that there haven't been some great concerts. The Rolling Thunder show I saw was amazing, the fall '81 tour was great and the real deal. But in comparison with a couple of exceptions like The Supper Club which was also great, the NET has been a tour of moments. Sometimes he'd hit it, sometimes not, and I suspect that's one of the reasons that they have been really slow in putting stuff out, along with that they know everyone has the bootlegs. The last two times I saw Bob were so so. The 2nd show at The Tower in Philly in 2017 was really good where he was pretty much on from the first note and clearly having fun throughout. It was a luck of the draw. The show the night before wasn't anywhere near as good.

Almost all my Bob reviews mention assholes in the audience who usually sit right near me. It's totally ridiculous. I'm old school. But when I first went to concerts including the early Bob concerts, you shut up during the song, and at most you whispered between songs. Somewhere along the line people got this ludicrous notion of 'it's a rock concert, I can do what I want'. Well Bob never was a fucking rock concert. My favorite line now 'cause it usually works, which I stole off a Facebook group called "Shut Up While The Band Is Playing" is: "Is Bob Dylan interrupting your conversation?" It works a lot better than shut the fuck up because the offender has to think about it.

Dylan's whole thing is not being who he was before. Whoever he was before no longer exists. Before could be yesterday. Sara Dylan said this almost 40 years ago during the divorce: "It was like living with a different person every day." A statement I've always believed.

Peter Stone Brown, Crotun on Hudson, May 2018

A Young Man With An Old Man's Voice

My first conscious remembrance of hearing a Bob Dylan song was in June of 1963, about a month before my twelfth birthday, at a Pete Seeger Concert in Lambertville, New Jersey my parents took me to. Seeger sang a lot of new songs by new songwriters that afternoon, but two songs stuck out: "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" and "Who Killed Davey Moore?" At the end of "Hard Rain," my dad turned to me and asked, "Do you know what that was about?" "The bomb," I replied, but it was a question. I didn't know it at the time, but those two songs were the beginning of something that was going to change and affect my life.

Shortly after that concert, I was sent off to a summer camp in Maryland while my family moved from Philadelphia to a small town in New Jersey near New York City. "Blowin' In the Wind," was a huge hit for Peter, Paul & Mary that summer and I heard it on the radios around the camp, but I had no idea it had anything to do with those songs I'd heard Pete Seeger sing. There was nobody in the camp who seemed to know all that much about music. At the end of the summer, I went to a new home in a new town. My brother Tony came home from the much hipper camp he went to in upstate New York a couple of days later. He'd been playing guitar a couple of years by then and he came home with all these new songs and told me all about this guy named Bob Dylan and how he was real into Woody Guthrie. My parents had Woody Guthrie records and my brother and I were big folk music fans, so I knew what he was talking about. It just so happened that this Bob Dylan guy was going to be on TV the next night on a special on "Freedom Songs." This was right before the March on Washington on 1963 when Dr. King gave his "I have a dream speech." That day my (younger) step-brother came home from his camp and he had presents for me and my brother. The Pete Seeger album *We Shall Overcome* that had "Davey Moore" and "Hard Rain" on it for me and *Freewheelin'* Bob Dylan for my brother. That night I watched the show. I think the Freedom Singers and Odetta were also on it, but it was Dylan who captured me. He was wearing a work shirt that was too big and his jeans were ripped. He sang "Blowin' In The Wind" and "Only A Pawn In Their Game." I'd never seen or heard anything like it. He sounded like an old man, but he had the most sensitive face I'd ever seen.

That fall I spent dealing with life in a new town and a new school. I didn't like either of them. I couldn't wait to get out each day and rush home and play *Freewheelin'* Bob Dylan. I think my favorites were "Don't Think Twice," "Corrina Corrina," "Talkin' World War III" and "I Shall Be Free." At the end of November, a week after the Kennedy assassination, Dylan came to the Mosque Theater in Newark. My parents bought us tickets. It was my first time going to a concert without them. My brother ran into some girls from his camp in the lobby. They were flipping out. They'd arrived early and Dylan had walked by them right through the lobby on his way into the theater. They were screaming and stuff. My first exposure to pop hysteria.

Our seats were in the balcony, but during the second half we snuck down to the sixth row. There weren't many people there. We probably could've gotten closer, but we were scared of getting discovered in the wrong seats. I don't remember

all that much about the show, except that he was really funny. He opened with "Times They Are A-Changin'" and did a lot of songs that weren't on Freewheelin', like "Talkin' John Birch" and "Walls of Redwing." He introduced Blowin' In the Wind, saying "Here's the song Newsweek said I didn't write." I'm pretty sure the encore was "With God On Our Side." "Walls of Redwing" stuck in my mind. I had no idea I wouldn't hear it again for ten years or so. In those days the best source of information on Dylan was Sing Out! Magazine which my brother and I subscribed to. I savored every picture and every mention.

That January I walked into the record store in my town and there was a new Bob Dylan album, The Times They Are A-Changin'. My first impulse buy! If anything else got on the turntable the next few months I don't remember it. And the fourth verse, my parents never heard the end of that. Every argument, every comment was met with "Don't Criticize What You Can't Understand." There was a folk show on every night on WJRZ called the Jerry White Show, and my brother and I listened religiously in hopes of hearing Dylan news. But Dylan didn't perform much in those days. It was past the days of the Gaslight and Folk City, so Times had to do. I must've played "Hattie Carroll" a thousand times. I thought the harp solo after the third verse was the saddest thing I'd ever heard.

At the end of that summer another Dylan album suddenly appeared: Another Side of Bob Dylan. It had no political songs. I didn't know what to think at first. Almost immediately there was an article in Sing Out!, an "Open Letter to Bob Dylan," by the editor of Sing Out!, Irwin Silber criticizing Dylan for abandoning protest. I didn't know what to think about that either. But I knew I loved the falsetto and the way he cracked up in "All I Really Wanna Do," and I knew I loved "Spanish Harlem Incident," and I knew that every line in "Chimes of Freedom" was real important, and I knew that "I Shall Be Free #10" and "Motorsycho Nitemare" cracked me up every time. And I knew that "I Don't Believe You" and "It Ain't Me, Babe" sounded a hell of a lot like rock 'n' roll. More Dylan articles were starting to appear and more pictures. And I read each article over and over and the pictures started going up on the walls of my bed room. One time during a trip to Philly, my brother and I saw this huge Dylan poster in Sam Goody's. We asked the salesman where to get it. It turned out the Columbia distribution place was right near my aunt's house. We came home with these big cardboard posters. The New Yorker had a big article on Dylan by Nat Hentoff. It was all about the Another Side session. Dylan talked about how he wasn't going to write "finger-pointing songs" any more.

That October, Dylan played at Philharmonic Hall in New York on Halloween. My parents got me and my brother tickets. It was the end of trick or treating for me. Our seats were in the first row of the balcony, and since the show was sold out, there wasn't any sneaking down to the orchestra this time. I think they cost three bucks. If I wasn't already completely converted, this was the night that did it. I can still remember every song he sang and every thing he said. Bob talked to

the audience a lot in those days, and people would shout out stuff and he'd reply. Someone shouted out "Play 'Corrina Corrina,'" and he said, "I haven't got my drums." Then someone shouted, "Play 'Mary Had A Little Lamb,'" and he said, "Is that a protest song?" Probably the most famous thing he said that night was "It's Halloween and I've got my Bob Dylan mask on." There were two extra microphones on stage one on each side of Dylan, and I suspected the show was being recorded.

He opened with "Times" and he'd play his guitar real loud into the mic, so it was almost distorting. He was wearing a sports-jacket, a black turtleneck shirt, pressed jeans and desert boots. I'd never seen anyone look so cool. He was wild and funny, and definitely in a good mood and his harp and guitar solos would get almost crazy at times. He did a bunch of old songs, a bunch of songs from Another Side and a bunch of brand new songs. On "Don't Think Twice," he shouted out the last half of each line: "Well it ain't no use to SIT AND WONDER WHY BABE." It was both funny and great. I was mesmerized, I'd never seen anything like it. I couldn't believe what I was seeing and hearing. When he started to play "I Don't Believe You," he kept playing the opening lick over and over again, till he finally cracked "Oh God!," then, "well, here's the second verse of it," but couldn't remember that either. Finally he asked jokingly, "Does anybody know the first line to this song?" Of course, a lot of people shouted it out.

But there were also new songs—in fact in those days one of the reasons you went to Dylan concerts was to hear the new songs—and what songs they were: "If You Gotta Go," "Gates of Eden," (introduced as a sacreligious lullabye in D-minor), "It's All Right Ma," and "Mr. Tambourine Man." Then Dylan brought out Joan Baez and they did another new song "Mama You Been On My Mind," as well as "It Ain't Me, Babe," and "With God On Our Side." Dylan also handed the guitar to Baez and she did "Silver Dagger" and he played harp. He came out alone for the encore, "All I Really Want To Do." The concert was a triumph in every way and the review in the New York Times spoke of his "new maturity." I didn't know it at the time, but I would never see him in concert like that again. I did know that I had to hear "Mr. Tambourine Man" again.

A couple of months later, I was hanging around this record store. I'd made friends with the salesman and he let me go in the back and look at all the promotional material. I came across this album cover slick (the front part). It was Bob Dylan in Concert. It was a great cover. It was a view of Dylan through the spotlight from a balcony. It was all black except for the color photo which was round with the words in white at the top in a half-circle around the photo. It was perfect. I snuck it out the store in a hurry. It was also the first Dylan album not to list the songs on the cover. I figured it had to be the Philharmonic Hall show. I waited and waited for it to come out. I had to hear "Tambourine Man" again. That February Dylan appeared on the Les Crane TV show. He came out and was wearing a suit! He had another guitarist, Bruce Langhorne with him Langhorne was playing an acoustic, but it had a pick-up. The song was "It's All Over Now,

Baby Blue” and it didn’t sound like folk music. It sounded like rock ‘n’ roll! (When he played the harp, his eyes would roll to the top of his head. My brother who played harp could imitate it perfectly and I made him do it again and again over the next few weeks.) After “Baby Blue,” Dylan sat down chatted with Crane. It was the beginning of the legendary interviews:

Crane: What do you do with all your money Bob?

Dylan: I buy lots of ashtrays, Les.

Crane: What do your friends call you?

Dylan: My friend’s call me Robert.

Tommy Sands, at the time Frank Sinatra’s son-in-law was also a guest. He took Dylan seriously and called him “Rob” throughout the show. At the end of the show, Dylan did “It’s All Right Ma.,” with Langhorne backing him. “That’s an excellent song,” my step-mother said. “He’ll make a great rock ‘n’ roll star,” my brother said.

You Only Had To Feel Them

In the early spring of 1965, I was listening one night to Jerry White’s folk show on WJRZ when he said, “We have a new single from Bob Dylan.” White sounded kind of hesitant, the tone of his voice implied that we were about to hear something very different. That single was “Subterranean Homesick Blues.” I didn’t know what to think. I liked it and hated it all at once. I didn’t know whether he was selling out as Sing Out! and other folk magazines were soon to proclaim. Naturally I bought it as soon as it hit the local record store, and ended up playing it as well as the flip-side, “She Belongs To Me” endlessly. About a month later, I was at an anti-Vietnam demonstration in Newark, New Jersey and snuck off the picket line into a record store across the street. There it was: Bringing It All Back Home in all its red-white-and-blue glory. I just stood there in the store holding it and staring at it for a good while. That night, it didn’t leave the turntable. I must’ve played “Mr. Tambourine Man” 20 times in a row. I was a few months shy of being 14 and quickly realized this was the album I’d been waiting for my entire life, and nothing would be the same again. It was funny and powerful, but still poetic, maybe more poetic than ever and absolutely brilliant. And I had no doubt that he was speaking right to me. I remember stopping after laughing hysterically at the beginning of “Bob Dylan’s 115th Dream,” where he cracks up, and putting the needle back to the beginning of the song. I couldn’t believe it! Soon I was playing “Maggie’s Farm” in the morning right before I left for school, and again the minute I got home. I’d pretty much given up on school at that point, and my parents decided to send me to a shrink. For weeks, I tried to explain things to him and felt I was getting nowhere. Finally one day I borrowed a portable record player from a friend, brought it to the session, and saying, “It’s like this,” played him “It’s Alright Ma.” I stopped seeing him shortly after that.

Even though "Subterranean Homesick Blues" wasn't a huge hit, Dylan's move to rock and roll was starting to change music. The Byrds hit with "Tambourine Man" and Dylan songs and imitation Dylan songs were getting recorded like mad. Everyone was jumping on the bandwagon. Bob was in the teen magazines here and music magazines in Europe where he was on tour. Columbia promoted this album like no Dylan album before it. There were cool little stand-up Dylan's wearing his suit and shades, holding an electric guitar and at the bottom it said, "Bob Dylan brings it all back home on Columbia Records," and there were other ones that said "No one sings Dylan like Dylan." I went out and bought a white shirt with a snap-tab collar, black shades and boots, and naturally started wearing them to school. The authorities weren't the least bit happy about this. Soon it was summer and I was going to camp — luckily a camp where Dylan was already pretty much of a hero. It was about mid-July when my brother came up to me and said, "I heard a new Dylan single on the radio and it has an organ on it!" I went crazy the next few days trying to find enough free time to listen to the radio long enough to hear it. The guys in my cabin used this to play all kinds of practical jokes on me. Finally one of the counselors went to New York on their day off and came back with a copy, and soon "Like A Rolling Stone" was on the radio all the time. Word of what went down at Newport that summer might have filtered into the camp, but what did filter in was Dylan was going to be at Forest Hills Tennis Stadium the very day camp ended.

It was off the bus from camp and on the subway to Queens. Right before the show, I ran into my brother who I didn't even know was coming. He'd just been arrested for littering—he was actually handing out anti-Vietnam literature. We could hear Dylan and his band doing their sound check. It was a cold and windy night for August and the atmosphere wasn't at all like the two previous Dylan shows I'd attended. Jerry White served as MC and brought out disc-jockey, Murray the K who said, "It's not rock, it's not folk, it's a new thing called Dylan") and was soundly booed. Finally, Dylan appeared alone, wearing a suit very much like the one on the cover of Bringing It All Back Home and started with "She Belongs To Me." In the middle of the song he walked to the side of the stage and started posing for photographers. This was a very different Dylan show. There were no "protest songs" and only time Dylan talked was to introduce "Desolation Row," which had the crowd cracking up on virtually every line. With the stage way out in the middle of the field, the intimacy of the Philharmonic Hall show less than a year before was gone. Dylan ended his set with "Tambourine Man."

After the intermission Jerry White appeared again and introduced another rock d.j. Gary Stevens of WMCA who also was booed. While the booing was going on, Dylan emerged with a four-piece band, ripped into "Tombstone Blues" and pandemonium broke loose. People were shouting and booing and cheering. The audience settled down to listen to the next song, the now-rocked-up "I Don't Believe You." At the conclusion, a new chant started "We want Dylan, we want Dylan." But he kept on playing, previewing the songs from Highway 61

Revisited. The booing and shouting continued, but during the songs the audience listened. Then all of a sudden during one of the songs, a bunch of young boys jumped on-stage followed by cops and security guards, chasing them around the stage. Dylan and his band kept right on playing. The next song, it happened again. Total craziness. Dylan went to the piano and played "Ballad of a Thin Man," the "something is happening, but you don't know what it is" line the perfect comment for the night. Finally, he did "Like A Rolling Stone" to more cheers and boos. The audience left divided in the chilly August night. Summer was over. A few days later, back in my hometown, I was walking down the street with my brother when I saw what looked like a new Dylan album in the window of the record store across the street. Sure enough, there was Highway 61 Revisited.

If Bringing It All Back Home not so gently bridged the gap between Bob Dylan the folksinger and Bob Dylan the rock 'n' roller with its half and half acoustic/electric format, Highway 61 was a full-force attack — the music relentlessly harder with Mike Bloomfield's lightning runs punctuating Dylan's lyrics and Al Kooper's organ providing a perfect carnival atmosphere. There was no doubt that Dylan's new songs demanded the accompaniment. The songs on Highway 61 stepped over the line into an upside down world of the absurd where emotion ruled over sense, the dominant emotion being confusion. Highway 61 is notable for its cast of characters, drawn from history, literature, theater, song, legend and myth. These characters were placed in a world where all notions of time and place collapse into a twilight dream zone of funhouse mirrors where anything can happen and impossible situations are the norm. Kings and Queens are out on the street with paupers, gamblers, freaks and con-men, all of them equal, all of them either tormented or tormenting, and all of them pulling some kind of scam.

If the songs on Highway 61 Revisited didn't make sense in a logical, linear way — and indeed their meaning is still being discussed and argued about more than 30 years later — they certainly made sense emotionally. You didn't have to understand them, you only had to feel them."

I barely had a chance to absorb the songs on Highway 61 when a new single "Positively Fourth Street" was released and quickly rose to the top of the charts. Unlike the songs on the album, "4th Street" a put-down song, probably directed at his old friends from the folk community, many of whom were rushing to condemn his move to rock, was easy to understand. The controversy Dylan had created with his Newport Folk Festival appearance earlier that summer raged in the fall issue of Sing Out! Magazine with several accounts of his performance, both pro and con.

A couple of weeks after "4th Street" was released, a friend called one night: "Listen, the guy on the radio announced 'Positively Fourth Street,' but it's not. It's some weird song about crawling out a window." He put the phone next to the radio and I could hear it. It certainly wasn't "4th Street." A few months later a new Dylan single, "Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window?" was

released. I bought it immediately, but when I played it I knew this wasn't what I heard on the phone earlier that fall. This was a mystery that wouldn't be revealed until years later.

A couple of weeks later Dylan came to the Mosque in Newark again, except this time it was renamed Symphony Hall. On the day of the show, I rode the bus to Newark and bought a ticket for three or four bucks. The ticket said "Stage site" and back then it was common to sit people on the stage at sellout shows. It was still early in the day and Newark wasn't any place to hang out for seven hours so I took the bus back home. As I took my seat I noticed a Cadillac limo going by the bus towards the theater. There was a head with a lot of hair in the back window. I'm still wondering and still kicking myself for not getting off the bus.

That night, by myself, I rode the bus back to Newark. When I got to the theater, there were kids from my school there. This was a first. No one in my school liked Dylan, but he had hit singles now. When I went to my seat, I found it wasn't on the stage though people were sitting there. My seat was where the orchestra pit should have been. They put out about four rows of folding chairs in front of the regular seats and mine was in the first row, second seat from the center! I couldn't believe my luck, but I didn't know if the show would be a replay of the craziness of Forest Hills or not. There were cops standing at each side of the stage.

Dylan came out wearing a grey suit and started again with "She Belongs To Me." The expression of his face looked just like the cover of *Times They Are A-Changin'*, but his hair was wild and long. During "Gates of Eden," he coughed a couple of times and a guard brought him a glass of water. He took a gulp and turned back to the microphone, "Excuse me, but I just got over a case of leprosy." The acoustic set was the same as Forest Hills. The audience was quiet and respectful.

After intermission he returned with what I later found out was the Hawks. They were all wearing suits and had real short hair and looked really straight next to Dylan. There was a row of huge Fender amps lined up behind them on the stage. Again they started with "Tombstone Blues," and proceeded to make the loudest, craziest noise I'd ever heard. Looking back, it was probably the first time I saw a rock 'n' roll band in concert, other than bands at my high school. If Dylan was somewhat sedate during the acoustic set, he was alive now, bouncing around on his high-heeled suede boots, turning furiously after each verse to Robbie Robertson who was unleashing guitar runs like I'd never heard, while the organist (who looked a little like Jonathan Winters) and the piano player were just going crazy. There was no booing! The next song really got me: "Baby Let Me Follow You Down," from Dylan's first album. I couldn't believe it! Then with his guitar still on, Dylan lowered his harmonica holder, and brought a harp to his lips. "This is called 'I Don't Believe You,' it used to be like that, but now it goes like this." And then, a slow very different "It Ain't Me Babe" and on through

“Maggie’s Farm” “Just Like Tom Thumb’s Blues,” “Thin Man” and “Rolling Stone.” This time, there was an encore, “Positively 4th St.”

A kid from school offered me a ride home. In the car, his father who was at the concert said, “I don’t see what all the fuss is about.” I didn’t know it then — and if anyone had told me, I would’ve been devastated — but it would be almost nine years before I would see Dylan in concert again .

50th Anniversary Thoughts On My First Dylan Concert

Fifty years ago today November 15th 2014, I attended my first Bob Dylan concert at the Mosque Theater, in Newark, New Jersey. I went with my older brother and younger (at the time) step brother who could’ve cared less. Our parents bought us the tickets, and thinking back it was the first concert I went to without parents. Arriving at the theater, my brother ran into some friends from the camp he attended the previous summer, who were flipping out because Dylan a few moments before had walked right by them on his way into the theater.

Dylan was not yet a star (though on the way) and the hall was not even close to being sold out as we found out when we took our seats in the balcony, nervously sneaking down to the orchestra during intermission. I can’t remember all the songs he did that night. Our only album was Freewheelin’ and three quarters of the concert was songs that were not on the album. He started with “The Times, They Are A-Changin’,” and followed with “Hollis Brown,” which I remember because I immediately recognized the melody as “Pretty Polly,” a song I had on a Pete Seeger album. He also did “Who Killed Davey Moore?” which I’d seen Seeger sing the previous June, “Talking John Birch Society Blues,” “Talkin’ World War III Blues,” “Don’t Think Twice, It’s Alright,” “Walls of Red Wing” “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall,” and “Blowin’ In The Wind,” introduced as “Here’s the song Newsweek said I didn’t write.” It just so happened that five months earlier my family had moved to the town where the person who said he wrote it (and later retracted that) lived. It’s possible that some of the other songs I heard that night were “Eternal Circle,” “Restless Farewell,” and “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll.” The encore was “With God On Our Side.”

I knew leaving the show that this was a concert unlike any I’d previously attended. The person onstage was looser, funnier and wilder than anyone I’d seen up to that point. What I couldn’t have possibly imagined that night as 12-years-old, was that 50 years later I’d still be going to see him and that I’d still be excited at the end of the night. Back then I couldn’t have imagined seeing anybody more than 100 times.

That night I had no idea of the totally crazy ride I was in for or that I'd see him on the same stage two years later with a rock and roll band. I had no idea after that night two years later that I wouldn't see him perform again for more than eight years. I had no clue he'd become the mad poetic absurdist rocker, the cowboy mystic in hiding, a country crooner and that he'd reappear as the person you thought he was only to disappear and reappear as someone else. I had no idea he'd reinvent himself a thousand different ways and never stop. I had no idea I'd own hundreds of bootlegs or even that a bootleg recording would exist. I had no idea that this one person would cause me to meet many new friends from all over the world. And I had no idea of all the different kinds of music his music would lead me to. But that night, he was just a new folksinger, (the term singer-songwriter did not exist) singing songs I'd never heard before, and some of those songs I wouldn't hear again until years later. But I knew that night, he was singing for me.

Another Side of Bob Dylan at 50

In my memory, Another Side of Bob Dylan appeared at the end of August in 1964, not at the beginning as various books and websites proclaim. Another Side would prove to be a pivotal album, one that signaled various beginnings and ends at the same time, though at the time no one knew that. It was the first time Dylan released two albums of new original material in the same year, something he would repeat the following year. And while there would eventually be other years that saw the release of two albums, the material either wasn't new or wasn't entirely original. It would be his last solo album of original songs (to this date) and his last solo album for 28 years until Good As I Been To You in 1992. And it was the first time he played piano on a record.

Another Side stood in sharp contrast to its predecessor, The Times, They Are A-Changin'. It was totally devoid of topical songs. About the closest it came to mentioning any kind of current even were joking references to Fidel Castro, Cuba and Barry Goldwater. There were no anthemic calls to action, and the freedom Dylan now sang about was personal freedom. While Dylan may have signaled this change was coming with the final song on Times, "Restless Farewell," back then we didn't really know it was coming. There weren't big pre-release reviews or interviews. Albums just came out and you knew by radio play, if you hung out in record stores, and maybe there was an ad in Billboard or Cashbox the week of release and an ad in Sing Out! magazine afterwards.

The songs on the album were deeply personal as well, and it would be too easy to say they were love songs because they were more out of love songs or perhaps in and out of love songs, and three of these songs, "To Ramona," "I Don't Believe You" and "It Ain't Me, Babe," Dylan would continue to perform fairly regularly for the next 40 years.

But back then, as a 13-year-old kid who'd been listening to Bob Dylan for exactly one year, there were certain things that tied it in a sense to Freewheelin', the talking songs, the humor, the way Dylan cracked up a couple of times in the middle of songs. Yet at the same time, despite the looseness of the album, which was recorded in one night, it was clear this was a major change, a departure and in the writing he seemed to be searching for something, he hadn't quite found yet or maybe he found it in "Chimes of Freedom." And on top of that quite a few of the songs, especially "I Don't Believe You" sounded suspiciously like rock and roll.

Fifty years on, my favorite song remains the same, "Spanish Harlem Incident." It might be the vocal, but it might also be that cool little guitar lick between the verses. In a lot of ways Another Side is also my favorite Dylan guitar album. He's not just strumming, he always has a bass pattern and at times other cool patterns going on.

While many of the songs on this album led by "It Ain't Me Babe" have undergone innumerable arrangements that have often changed the feel and depending on Dylan's vocal at any given time at the very least expanded the meaning, the feel on Another Side is one of sadness.

It seems ridiculous now, but Another Side was controversial upon release mainly for not being controversial. The editor of Sing Out! magazine, Irwin Silber wrote an "Open Letter to Bob Dylan" for moving away from politics and suggesting he should try riding the subway more often. It was sort of a big deal at the time. In October, an article on and interview with Dylan, "The Crackin', Shakin', Breakin' Sounds' " by Nat Hentoff, who attended and described the session for Another Side appeared in the New Yorker in which Dylan said he didn't want to write any more "finger-pointing songs." So after 50 years, while you never see Another Side at the top or even close to the top on anyone's Best of Dylan list, and while it in many ways is a transitional album, in fact an arrow on a door post, it really is one of his more important records and one that's as real as it gets.

Halloween at Philharmonic Hall 50 Years Later

After 50 years, it might be the concert and the weekend of music I remember best. It was Halloween and a Saturday and until that day Halloween meant costumes and going for blocks trick or treating. And Halloween on a Friday or Saturday meant an extra long night of trick or treating. But not this time. Bob Dylan was at Philharmonic Hall, my second Bob Dylan concert. My parents had sent away for tickets for my brother, our friend Jim and I at the enormous cost of 12 bucks. I'd been a teenager for 3 ½ months and my step-mom probably wasn't enamored of the prospect of us going to a then still new concert hall wearing

jeans and a sports jacket. In those days you dressed up for concerts. But I don't think they put up too much of a fuss and sometime that afternoon we took the bus to New York, 20 miles away. We walked up 8th Avenue from Port Authority Terminal to 49th Street, and our first stop, Sam Goody's, which called itself "The World's Largest Record Store." (In the next decade in another city, I'd work at Sam Goody's, but that's another story.) Records! The very idea of records sent a big light bulb or maybe more accurately fireworks off in my brain. (And even now there are times it still does.) Sam Goody's was a full catalog store which meant they had every record in print. My brother and I raced through the racks pulling out all the records we wanted. We had enough money for one apiece. We created quite a comical spectacle laying out about 20 records on top of the browsers, and narrowing it down to two. After that, walked to Lincoln Center and Philharmonic Hall.

The energy was high at Philharmonic Hall, outside and in. The hall was only two years old and Bob Dylan was the first non-classical musician to perform there.

I'd discovered Bob Dylan a little more than a year before and in that one year there was plenty to make him controversial. For one thing, there was the town I lived in, the home of Lorre Wyatt who once claimed he wrote "Blowin' In The Wind" and eventually recanted several years later. Just about the entire town believed him. There was Bob Dylan's speech at the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee Dinner where he was given the Tom Paine award and managed to insult everyone in the room. My parents were sort of into folk music though classical music was their primary preference. My dad had seen Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly perform. They liked some of Bob Dylan's songs, but they knew he was my hero, not theirs. And my step-mom may have liked what his songs said, but she didn't trust him. Throwing a slight mind-fuck into my 13-year-old mind was the latest issue of Sing Out!, the folk song magazine. My brother and I had a subscription and latest issue arrived sometime between the release of Another Side Of Bob Dylan and the Philharmonic Hall concert. In that issue was "An Open Letter To Bob Dylan" by the magazine's editor Irwin Silber who wasn't happy that Dylan didn't sing any protest songs at that summer's Newport Folk Festival. He also didn't like that Dylan was hanging out with his friends, and thought he needed to ride the subway more often. It was enough to make me wonder whether Dylan would sing any of the songs I'd come to love during the previous year. At roughly the same time there was a long article and interview with Dylan in the New Yorker, that described the Another Side session and in which Dylan talked of writing more personal songs.

Back then you went to see Bob Dylan not only to hear your favorite songs, but also to hear new songs and what he had to say. It took a couple of decades but bootleg records eventually forced Dylan to stop playing new songs in concert before he recorded them. At the time of the Philharmonic concert, Dylan had not yet performed any of the songs from Another Side in New York City. He sang five songs from the album, and introduced five other new songs, "Mama You Been On

My Mind," "If You Gotta Go, Go Now," "Gates Of Eden," "It's Alright Ma, I'm Only Bleeding" and "Mr. Tambourine Man."

Our seats were in the balcony in the first row. Dylan, obviously in good spirits was loose and very funny. Back then people didn't talk at concerts. They listened. If you said anything at all, you whispered it between songs. At this particular concert, the audience also in good spirits, often shouted requests or sometimes funny questions, and this night, Dylan responded. "Play 'Corrina Corrina!'" "I haven't got my drums." "What do you do for a living?" "I hope I never have to make a living." "Play Mary Had A Little Lamb." "Is that a protest song?" Listening to the album released 40 years later, it's often hard to hear the questions. A couple of times he seemed to start playing a song, and abandon it before singing. Before "If You Gotta Go, Go Now," plays what sounds like the beginning to a different song, stops and says, "Don't let that scare you. It's just Halloween. I have my Bob Dylan mask on." The best example of how he could relate to an audience and turn what could have been an awkward situation into comedy is when he forgets the first verse to "I Don't Believe You," running through the song on his guitar, going up the neck, stopping and saying, "Oh God." Then after strumming some more, "Here's the second verse of it, finally asking, "Does anybody know the first verse of this song?"

It's hard to tell from the album, but Dylan was playing and singing loudly throughout the night. On the breaks between verses he'd bring his guitar right to the microphone and play even louder. The best example of this is the totally crazy version of "Don't Think Twice," where he'd shout out the first line with the following line much lower. The wild harp break was a sign of what was to come two years later. For years I wondered if I really heard what I heard that night on that song until a bootleg answered the question six years later.

Listening to the album today, the thing I noticed is how clearly Dylan articulated each word emphasizing the lyrics. For the past five decades, comics imitating Dylan will mumble incoherently usually in the Blonde On Blonde voice, as well as critics who clearly weren't paying attention saying they couldn't understand him when in reality he was making his words quite clear.

In the end, the songs that totally hit me that night, the songs that I knew were on a totally other level were "Gates Of Eden," "It's Alright Ma," and "Mr. Tambourine Man." I left Philharmonic Hall that night with the last song in my head where it stayed for about five, maybe six months until I heard it again. I would never see Bob Dylan engage with an audience that way again. He was only 23.

That night my brother and I stayed with friends in the city, and the next afternoon we headed downtown to Greenwich Village and the Village Gate for the very first Broadside Hoot. Broadside magazine was a mimeographed songbook/magazine that printed the new songs by Dylan, Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton and the other songwriters in Greenwich Village and sometimes from around the country. Phil Ochs was at the Philharmonic Hall concert and probably some of the

other songwriters onstage were as well. A year before *Sing Out!* had a cover story on all of them that included Dylan.

The show cost one dollar. The performers were Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton, Eric Andersen, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Len Chandler, Julius Lester, Peter La Farge, Pete Seeger, Judy Collins, and surprise guest Ramblin' Jack Elliott. There may have been a couple of other performers I can no longer remember. Each singer did one song, and most of the songs were brand new. Ramblin' Jack did Woody's "1913 Massacre." It was my first time seeing all of them except for Pete Seeger. Phil Ochs seemed to be the catalyst for the show, and a few months later an album, *The Broadside Singers* was released with all the performers playing together doing many of the songs played that afternoon. Near the end of the show, Ochs took the stage again with Eric Andersen, saying there's two songwriters we can't leave out, and the two sang Lennon and McCartney's "I Should Have Known Better." *The Broadside Hoots* (I went to most of them) continued on a monthly basis until sometime the following spring. By that time, *Bringing It All Back Home* was out, and within a couple of years most of the musicians on that stage would have bands on their records.

Bob Dylan's Myth Busting Cutting Edge

In the middle of January 1965, Bob Dylan went into Columbia Records Studios in New York to begin work on his fifth album, an album that would be very different from his previous four. He had a few musician friends from the New York folk scene, guitarist Bruce Langhorne, John Sebastian who was starting to a lot of studio work playing harmonica, and blues singer John Hammond. One of the things these three musicians had in common was all of them were experimenting with playing electric instruments. Hammond was about to release his third album, *So Many Roads*, his second with a band, a band that included a guitarist named Jaime R. Robertson, a drummer, Mark Levon Helm, an organist, Eric Hudson and a piano player, Michael Bloomfield. Bruce Langhorne, a well-known side man who played and recorded with several artists including The Clancy Brothers & Tommy Makem and Odetta, had started using a De Armond pickup in his Martin guitar. Six months after these sessions John Sebastian, also a singer, songwriter and guitarist would have a top ten hit, "Do You Believe In Magic" with his band The Lovin' Spoonful. Also at the session were some of the top studio players in New York. This was the beginning of one of Bob Dylan's most creative periods, recording three albums in 14 months that would change American popular music and redefine songwriting.

The *Cutting Edge* (Columbia Legacy), the 12th volume of Dylan's bootleg series is available in three very different editions, a two-disc Best Of, a six disc Deluxe, and an 18-disc limited Collector's Edition available exclusively on bobb Dylan.com that includes every studio track Dylan recorded in 1965 and 1966 with the last disc featuring several songs recorded in hotel rooms in England in 1965 and '66

as well as songs recorded during an interview with music journalist Robert Shelton. There is as with the last several Bootleg Series a picture book, and another book that includes liner notes, reminisces by musicians and track listing and musician credits. While a lot of the stuff on the 18th disc has been bootlegged, of particular interest are songs played by Dylan and Robbie Robertson which were featured in Dylan's rarely seen film, *Eat The Document* which show where Dylan's music might have gone had he not had the motorcycle crash a few months later. While there are several additional goodies in the Collector's Edition, including all the 45 rpm singles recorded in '65 and '66, the price has quite a few Dylan fans not exactly happy. The Deluxe and Collector's Editions are programmed in the order the songs were recorded, though the Deluxe version has a couple of exceptions to accommodate placing every take of "Like A Rolling Stone" on one disc. Which version to get depends on your economic situation and your level of interest. If you don't like hearing several versions of the same song in a row, get the two-disc Best of. Most of it was featured on the recent NPR "First Listen" and it allows you to appreciate each take. This review however is about the deluxe six CD edition. The liner notes make it very clear that these are not perfect or finished recordings, and what you might hear at the end of the day in the studio during playback, though the recordings are not rough mixes.

One of the important things, perhaps the important thing about The Bootleg Series, and especially the volumes devoted to studio recordings, is they provide a key to Dylan's creative process both lyrically and musically. On *The Cutting Edge*, this process is revealed like never before. Dylan likes to record fast in the studio and compared to other musicians, he does record fast. *Bringing It All Back Home* was completed in three days, *Highway 61* in six and the Nashville sessions for *Blonde On Blonde* in eight. When Dylan comes into the studio with a completed song, things usually happen fast, the song is done in a couple of takes. However, on these three albums he arrived in the studio with several songs that weren't finished. At times it seems as if the ideas were coming so fast, he'd start on a new song before finishing the one before, just to make sure he had the idea down. Some had placeholder lyrics, incomplete choruses and on others while he usually had the melody or something close, he wasn't necessarily sure where he wanted it to go musically. Dylan's whole thing when working with other musicians was getting great players who would know what to do instinctively leaving the songs open to improvisation and most of all spontaneity. Dylan was not afraid to be adventurous.

Among the many surprises of these recordings are songs done in completely different arrangements and time signatures, such as "Just Like A Woman" done to a Bo Diddley beat or a completely crazed "Leopard Skin Pillbox Hat" that is anything but a blues that happened because Al Kooper discovered various sound effects on the keyboard he was using and started having fun. Sometime arrangements go full circle or close to it. Take One of "It Takes A Lot To Laugh" finds Dylan playing piano with a rhythm that isn't too far from the released

version, but the song becomes a wild rocker before returning to something close to the feel of the first take with Dylan on guitar instead of piano.

Another song where you can really trace the development of both arrangement and lyrics is "Memphis Blues Again." The first take is slower, not quite the same melody and the first time around Dylan sings "Nashville Blues" again. It takes several tries at various tempos with changes in arrangements before both Dylan and the Nashville musicians find what they're looking for. On the way there, Dylan is searching for the right way to phrase the words he's written, sometimes due to the temp and other times simply because he doesn't have the song down yet. The Deluxe edition takes you up to the version before the final one. The band now knows what they want to do, and Dylan's phrasing and delivery is almost there. Now from the minute I first heard this song back in 1966, I always considered it to be incredibly funny, primarily because of Dylan's phrasing, whether it's the way he sings "The Senator came down here" or "Your debutante just knows what you need/But I know what you want." However there are times in the early takes where I found myself wondering if he originally didn't intend the song to be funny.

The songs on *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde On Blonde* are when Dylan moved strongly into symbolism often combined with a wonderful sense of the absurd. These are the songs that solidified Dylan's reputation and also the songs that caused everything Dylan wrote, did, said, wore, muttered, ate, and sneezed to be analyzed to death for the 50 years following their release. With the lyrical revelations on this album, I don't see that stopping. You may find yourself thinking well maybe I didn't really know what that song was about when you hear early lyrics that put a whole new spin on a song's possible meaning or you realize that the choruses of "Tombstone Blues," "Memphis Blues Again" or "Just Like A Woman" weren't necessarily set in stone. At the same time, while Dylan has never considered his lyrics as sacrosanct as his fans, he clearly is always searching for the right word, the right line, the one that will pierce through the hardest. And if that line or word or phrase occurs to him in the middle of recording a song or onstage or anywhere else, it makes it no less valid. The other incredible thing about this period of Dylan is how different the sound is on each album. *Bringing It All Back Home* had only been out for a few months when the sessions for *Highway 61* started, and following *Highway 61*, even though he was on the road constantly, sessions started a little more than a month after its release. Some of the change in sound is because Dylan changed producers after recording "Like A Rolling Stone" from Tom Wilson to Bob Johnston, but it's also because there were different musicians on each album. Of the two, Wilson was more hands-on, though not overly so, while Johnston was about creating an environment for things to happen and then letting whatever happened happen.

Bringing It All Back Home was the album to (hopefully) ease Dylan out of the role of solo folksinger. Much of the sound of the album after a bit of experimentation is due to the guitar work of Bruce Langhorne, the only musician on the record to

appear on both the electric side and the acoustic side. As noted above, Langhorne played an acoustic guitar with a pickup, but he had this cool yet gentle electric sound, a sound he would also use backing Joan Baez, Richard and Mimi Farina and Tom Rush among others. Langhorne pretty much set the standard for how to back up a solo singer playing an acoustic guitar with an electric guitar, an art in itself. He knew how to do it without overplaying, and without being intrusive. Check out how he develops his part on both "She Belongs To Me" and "Love Minus Zero/No Limit." One of the more revealing things about this set is the attention paid to songs a lot of people consider minor tracks, "Outlaw Blues" and "On The Road Again." Take two of "Outlaw Blues" starts out with Dylan playing incredibly raunchy electric guitar backed by John Sebastian on harp and it takes a couple of verses for the other musicians to fall in. "On the Road Again" goes through a few rhythmic changes before arriving at the simpler version on the album.

Of the songs left off Bringing It All Back Home, why "If You Gotta Go" was left off is a mystery, though it's possible some higher up found the lyrics too suggestive. Manfred Mann's cover was briefly banned in England. There are two versions included, one solo acoustic and one with a band featuring Frank Owens on piano and a woman backup singer. For years Dylan fans have been trying to find out who the singer was, and it was recently discovered that the singer was Angeline Butler, a member of a group called The Pilgrims who also recorded for Columbia. Just as interesting is the fact that Angeline Butler was an organizer for SNCC (The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and was one of the organizers representing SNCC at the 1963 March On Washington.

If Bringing It All Back Home was a step in the water, Highway 61 Revisited was Dylan's full-blown move into rocking out with a heavier band. Disc Three is devoted solely to the song "Like A Rolling Stone," presenting all 15 takes. The first takes have Dylan on piano playing the song in waltz time, and pianist Frank Owens stops the proceedings to break down the arrangement so the other musicians can learn it. The next day Dylan switches to guitar, the time signature is changed to 4/4, and Al Kooper sneaks in on organ and they nail it on the 4th take. For whatever reason, Dylan keeps recording several more takes apparently not realizing he had it down. It was rare for Dylan to keep recording once he had the take down, but at the same time he realized the importance of this song. The in studio chatter is included and it's one of the few times Dylan shows real irritation. Also included are the four stems that make up the song since this was a four track recording, Dylan's voice and guitar, Mike Bloomfield's guitar with drums leaking in, Paul Griffin's piano and Joe Macho's bass and Al Kooper's organ and Bobby Gregg's drums. Of these stems, the most interesting is clearly Bloomfield's guitar part and it should be noted this is a more isolated version than the one that appeared on last year's box set devoted to Bloomfield. The notes say the producers included the stems to show how the sum is greater than its parts and in this case they are right.

The sound of Highway 61 would be dominated by two musicians, guitarist Mike Bloomfield and Al Kooper a friend of Tom Wilson's who was hoping to play guitar, but gave up that notion the second he saw Bloomfield play. He snuck into the studio during "Like A Rolling Stone" came up with an organ part that helped make the song a hit and became an in demand keyboard player, an instrument he quickly had to learn. In taking over from Wilson, producer Bob Johnston retained the sound of "Like A Rolling Stone" for the rest of the album. Bloomfield's incredible playing dominates and more than once Dylan expresses his excitement over what he's hearing, even working him into the last verse of a previously unheard take of "Sitting On A Barbed Wire Fence." What we have is several takes of truly legendary songs, and while quite a few takes of "It Takes A Lot To Laugh" (aka "Phantom Engineer") have surfaced over the years, there are additional ones, and for the first time additional takes of "Ballad of A Thin Man," "Queen Jane Approximately," "Desolation Row" including one on piano and one with a full band as well as additional takes of "Positively Fourth Street" and "Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window?"

In early October while "Like A Rolling Stone" was fading and "Positively 4th Street" was still a hit, Dylan went into the studio again this time with his new road band, Levon and the Hawks (who three years later would emerge as The Band). They would record an early version of "Temporary Like Achilles," titled "Medicine Sunday," a 40 second joke, "Jet Pilot," a nod to the Beatles, "I Wanna Be Your Lover," and untitled instrumental. At the end of November they returned to the studio again with Bobby Gregg replacing Levon who had quit the tour. They recorded a new version of "Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window" that was quickly released as a single that ultimately did not do well, and several takes of a new song "Visions of Johanna" though at the time its title was "Seems Like A Freezeout." Four versions and a rehearsal are included. Some of these versions have circulated over the years and one was previously released on Bootleg Series #7. The first couple of takes are insanely fast and then they slow it down, but they fail to come up with the feel Dylan is looking for. The Hawks were a bar band put together by rockabilly singer Ronnie Hawkins. They were steeped in R&B and Chicago blues and were something of a legend in Toronto where Robbie Robertson was the boy guitar hero to a lot of local musicians. Onstage with Dylan they were an explosion every night, but they hadn't yet mastered the subtlety needed for this song. In January, Dylan would enter the studio with the Hawks again this time with another former member of Ronnie Hawkins's Hawks, Sandy Konikoff on drums and attempt another new song, "She's Your Lover Now." The song which ambitiously is Dylan talking to an ex and her boyfriend, alternating between them in each verse, has some of the most devastating lines Dylan ever wrote ("You just sit around and ask for ashtrays, can't you reach?"), and one legendary take comes close to completion, but fizzles out and Dylan eventually records the song in a much slower version alone on piano. This set has a previously unheard take that sound and tempo wise is halfway between "Like A Rolling Stone" and "One Of Us Must Know (Sooner or Later)" a song Dylan would record a few days later. The inclusion of

the new versions makes the connection between the songs much more clear and left me with the feeling Dylan dropped it in favor of the newer song.

When Dylan returned to the studio a few days later the only Hawks present were Robbie Robertson and Rick Danko, joined by Al Kooper on organ, Paul Griffin on Piano and Bobby Gregg on drums. The main order of business is recording "One Of Us Must Know." Dylan doesn't have the complete words yet or the chorus. By take 24 he does and the song is released as a single, his first of 1966 and the only song on *Blonde On Blonde* to be recorded in New York, but it doesn't catch on. However it remains one of Dylan's greatest songs and Paul Griffin's incredible piano part is one of the greatest contributions to any Dylan record. Dylan would make a couple of more attempts to record the next few days, but the session on January 27th would be his last in New York City for four years.

Bob Johnston had been urging Dylan to record in Nashville, an idea Dylan's manager Albert Grossman wasn't thrilled with. Johnston had a crew of young session musicians who soon would be among the top session musicians. One, Charlie McCoy had played the acoustic guitar part on "Desolation Row." While some people seem to think that because *Blonde On Blonde* was recorded in Nashville, it's a country record, there is not one close to country song on the album. If anything, the song structure quite often is closer to what was going on down the road in Memphis. The Nashville musicians had to adjust to Dylan's working habits, and to make sure he retained something of the hit sound he'd developed he brought with him Al Kooper and Robbie Robertson. For one Kenny Buttrey was the perfect drummer for Dylan's music, and Dylan was finally able to come up with the version of "Visions Of Johanna." Considering the song is heavy with obvious New York City imagery, it's kind of funny Dylan had to go to Nashville to get the musical ambiance to complement the lyrics. With the exception of one version of "Memphis Blues Again" that appeared on *Bootleg Series Volume 7*, this is the first time outtakes from the Nashville sessions for *Blonde On Blonde* have appeared. They've never been bootlegged. And again when a song is complete or close to complete like "Absolutely Sweet Marie" or "Most Likely You Go Your Way or I'll Go Mine," it's captured reasonably quickly. On the songs that aren't complete, it takes a bit more time and the phases a song can go through is among the things that make this set interesting and important. And while the musicians had to wait hours for Dylan to finish the song, they pretty much nail "Sad Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands" on the first take, though it turns out that take four was the one on the album.

What *The Cutting Edge* ultimately does is give the listener a real look at how these three legendary albums were created. Not all of the takes are great, some aren't even close. Sometimes it's not the easiest listen, and I don't recommend trying to play all six discs in one day. But when Dylan and the musicians he's working with hit it, they really hit it, even if the take eventually fizzles out. So while this set clearly dispels the notion of Dylan as a one or two take artist and also shows that a lot of songs didn't not magically appear fully formed in his

brain, the listener gets a unique glimpse at the work it took to make them come together.

And one other thing, while this isn't necessarily always the case with Bob Dylan records, on these three albums, the takes that ended up on those albums were the best takes which is why they were on the albums.

Highway 61 Revisited, revisited

It was a bright, sunny day and I was walking with my brother down the main street of our town, (a suburb of New York in northern New Jersey), when I saw what looked like a new Bob Dylan album in the window of the record store across the street. We crossed the street and discovered my eyes were not wrong: there in the window sat Highway 61 Revisited. We had been away at camp all summer, which ended just in time for Dylan's concert at Forest Hills, but we had no idea a new album was coming. Bringing It All Back Home was only five months old. Whatever else we had intended for the day ended in that moment and we rushed home to spend the rest of the day (and night) absorbing the album.

Aside from "Like A Rolling Stone", which had been a hit for over a month by this time, we recognized five of the nine songs from the Forest Hills performance only two days prior. Although the contentious atmosphere at the show hadn't exactly allowed for a full appreciation, now we had titles to go with the songs we had heard.

The sound was harder and tougher than Bringing It All Back Home and it quickly became clear that Dylan had taken the lyrics into new, uncharted territory. He combined symbolism with absurdity in a way that initially seemed incomprehensible, which was bolstered by the semi-comedic liner notes. We didn't even stop to think about the fact that most of the songs were based on blues; that would come later.

Immediately noticeable was the lead guitar, played by Mike Bloomfield. The riffs he played after each chorus of "Tombstone Blues" were like nothing we'd heard before.

It was, almost to the day, my second anniversary as a Bob Dylan fan. Considering how much he'd changed and grown in those two years alone — to this day one would be hard pressed to track similar growth in such a short period of time, in any artist, in any field. It was very clear that Dylan was still writing about what was going on in the world, but the targets weren't as defined or simplistic. Topics like war and peace or civil rights weren't the main issue. Dylan was singing about the madness of society and the music and lyrics matched that madness. Most of the songs displayed a healthy contempt for the conventions and institutions of society, as well as authority, and the rapid-fire laser sharp

tone of the lyrics knocked down one icon after another. Blink, or get distracted, and you missed it. He combined symbolism with absurdity in a way that initially seemed incomprehensible, which was bolstered by the semi-comedic liner notes.

As hard and charged as the album was, there was also time for tenderness, sadness and beauty. It's all in Dylan's voice on "It Takes A Lot To Laugh, It Takes A Train To Cry"; in a performance he's never come close to equaling. And while "Queen Jane Approximately" is in many ways a put down song, there's a lot of affection in those lyrics. Then there's "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues". On one level, the ultimate song about being wasted, yet it's so much more than that. A song that would become explosive in concert, but in this version there's a sadness that pervades every verse, echoed by Bloomfield's at times weeping guitar, against Paul Griffin's piano. Then, of course, there's "Like A Rolling Stone", but the reason the lyrics work is the sadness of a person who's hit bottom.

The exploration of Highway 61 Revisited would continue for months and, as it turned out, years. "Desolation Row" still has new revelations that surface every now and then. How many songs can you say that about after listening to them for fifty years? But back then it was all new, the songs, the sound, the musicians – many of them doing the greatest work they ever did and, in some cases, almost by accident. But back then, on that sunny day in August, we knew we were listening to something great and something that would last. And that album got me through the coming school year. Have a crappy day, go home, put on Highway 61 Revisited and go somewhere else. I'm generally not one to talk in terms of best, but it might be the best album Bob Dylan recorded, maybe the best album anyone has ever recorded.

Bob Dylan at Forest Hills, 40 Years Later

Forty-five years ago today, I got off a bus from camp at Union Square in New York City, handed my Dad my duffle bag, and with some other kids hopped on the subway out to Forest Hills in Queens for my third Bob Dylan concert and Bob Dylan's first concert (as opposed to a set at a folk festival) with a band. For the past six weeks, "Like A Rolling Stone" had been played constantly and way up the charts on the Top 40 AM radio stations. A couple of days before the show, there had been a strange interview with Dylan by Robert Shelton in the New York Times, where Dylan had talked about understanding green clocks and purple statues.

Lining up outside the stadium, we could hear the band sound checking, the guitars, drums and organ drifting in a muddled mass over the stadium walls. When Highway 61 Revisited came out a few days later, I realized one of the songs we'd heard was "It Takes A Lot To Laugh, It Takes A Train to Cry."

Inside the stadium, the stage was way out on the field, nowhere near the seats in the stands. As night fell, the air became cold, as if the stadium was a wind tunnel.

The first big difference from the two previous Dylan concerts I'd attended was several disc jockeys making introductions before the show began. At the other shows while there may have been a no smoking announcement, there was no introduction, Dylan would just walk out and start playing, "The Times They Are A-Changin'."

The first DJ to speak was Jerry White who had a nightly folk show on WJRZ and was the first person in the New York City area to play "Subterranean Homesick Blues" about five months earlier. He then introduced Murray the K, who had christened himself the Fifth Beatle, and White introduced him as such. For years Murray had presented rock and roll shows at the Brooklyn Paramount Theater and a couple of years later he would present the first show in the US by the Who, and if my memory serves the first show by Cream. He had his own way of talking often adding e-az into his words, so if he said say the word baby it would come out beazaby. Murray was massively booed immediately and when he said, "...it's not rock, it's not folk, it's a new thing called Dylan, adding that "Bobby is what's happening," it got worse. White trying to be a calming influence took the microphone and quickly said, "I suggest you give a warm welcome to Bob Dylan." Shortly after that, Dylan appeared alone with his acoustic guitar and harmonica holder wearing a suit, his hair blowing wildly in the wind and began with "She Belongs To Me." During one of the harp breaks, he walked to the side of the stage and posed for the crew of press photographers while playing.

Continuing with "To Ramona," "Gates of Eden" and "Love Minus Zero," he then said, "This is called "Desolation Row," and then launched into a cast of characters that had never been in a song before.

It was in fact a song like no song before it. He sang with immaculate timing, the audience cracking up on lines like, "One hand is tied to the tight-rope walker, the other is in his pants." "Mr. Tambourine Man" closed the set. Fifteen or so minutes later, White appeared again and introduced Gary Stevens the top disc jockey on WMCA. Stevens probably taking a cue from Murray the K's reception wasted little time in introducing Dylan.

Dylan appeared accompanied by four guys we found out days later were Robbie Robertson, Levon Helm, Al Kooper and Harvey Brooks and blasted into "Tombstone Blues" and pandemonium erupted, though the crowd quieted down by the third verse. However the tension was thick and the song's conclusion the reaction was clearly divided between applause and boos.

Dylan then started the most obvious song destined to be rocked up from Another Side of Bob Dylan, "I Don't Believe You," with the audience quiet during the song, but at the end the cheers and boos were again divided with a large portion

of the crowd chanting, "We want Dylan." Dylan responded saying, "Aw! Come on," which was met by laughter, and went into "From A Buick Six." The boos were somewhat less and Dylan continued with "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues," the first song of the electric set to really hit me. But then during the next to last verse, a bunch of kids, all boys suddenly took off from the stands and ran across the field and up onto the stage, chased by cops, in and around the musicians. Nothing like this had ever happened at any concert I'd been to previously.

"Maggies' Farm" started to some applause but on the line "I try my best to be just like I am," the crowd erupted again in a wave of cheers and boos. Then to applause on the first line, Dylan began "It Ain't Me Babe," and at the first chorus half the audience started shouting along which they did on each chorus.

It was appearing that Dylan was starting to win the crowd over, and a second wave of kids ran onto the stage again chased by the cops. Dylan put down his guitar and sat at piano – his first time playing it on-stage and went into "Ballad Of A Thin Man," though everyone thought it was called "Mr. Jones." The effect of hearing this song for the first time was beyond amazing, and it seemed perfect for the tension filled atmosphere. "Like A Rolling Stone" which once again divided the crowd ended the show. There was no encore and we filed out somewhat dazed into the chilly August night, feeling like we had somehow narrowly evaded a riot.

A few days later walking down the main street of my town with my brother, looking at the window of the record store across the street, I said, "Hey, that looks like a new Dylan album. We crossed the street to check it out, and sure enough there was Highway 61 Revisited. Whatever we were going to do that day immediately ended. We took it home and found out the names of the new songs we'd heard a few nights before. Nothing would be the same again.

Reviving A Memory

On October 2, 1965, I attended my fourth Bob Dylan concert at Symphony Hall, in Newark, NJ. It was a concert that's barely been mentioned or written about except as far as I know by me in an [article](#) I wrote for Bobdylan.com a long time ago. For years there were no photos and if anyone recorded it, it has yet to surface. Last summer, a friend shared a photo from the show of Dylan at the piano. It was a close-up, but that photo could have been from anywhere.

A few days ago, a photo appeared on the Levon Helm tribute page on Facebook, of Dylan, Levon Helm and Robbie Robertson by photographer Thom Cronin that totally blew my mind because it was so close to the vantage point from which I

witnessed the show. I'd been carrying around an image in my mind of that show for more than 49 years and this photo brought it to life.

I was 14, and my family had moved to North Jersey two years before. I had a job a couple of days a week after school and on Saturday mornings. So the day of the show, I rode my bike home, and immediately called up the theater to see if tickets were still available. They were, so I took a bus to Newark. I'm pretty sure this was the first concert I bought a ticket to myself without asking my parents. I'd just seen Dylan a little over a month before at Forest Hills, so I figured if I asked them to get me a ticket they would have said, "You just saw him." So I bought the ticket which was maybe four dollars, probably less. The ticket said "stage site," and in those days it was not uncommon for people to be seated on the stage so that's where I thought I'd be sitting.

It was still several hours to the show, so I got on a bus to go back home. As I took my seat, I couldn't help but notice a Cadillac limo going in the other direction headed towards the theater. As I looked out the window, I thought I saw a lot of hair through the rear window of the Caddy. But I didn't have enough money on my for another bus fare.

When I returned to Symphony Hall that night, I saw a bunch of kids from my class at junior high school. To put this in perspective, I was a long-haired, poetry reading and writing, anti-Vietnam war button wearing, folk-singing freak and I took a lot of shit for it. And to add another dimension to it, Bob Dylan was pretty much universally despised in the entire town. The town I lived in was also the home of Lorre Wyatt, the guy who said he wrote "Blowin' In The Wind" and eventually recanted his story. But no amount of proof (and there's a lot more proof now than there was then) could dissuade the people in that town from believing Wyatt wrote the song. So when I saw these kids from my class in the lobby, my reaction was oh no! The enemy! They were all wearing jackets and ties which was pretty standard for going to a concert back then. I was wearing some dumpy sports jacket and jeans. I thought it was pretty funny when they said to me, "What are you doing here?" especially since my first Dylan concert was in the same theater almost two years before, when the theater was known as The Mosque. So I answered them, "The question is, what are you doing here." Of course I knew what the answer was, Dylan had two hit singles, "Like A Rolling Stone" and "Positively 4th Street," and the second was still high on the charts at the time of the concert.

I walked away to find my seat, expecting to be led to the stage. Instead I was directed to go down into the auditorium. All the way down. A couple of rows of folding chairs had been set up in front of the regular seats and my seat was in the first row, second chair in from the center aisle. Holy shit! I couldn't believe it!

There were a couple of guards against the wall on each side of the stage. I

figured this was because of the stage rush that had happened at Forest Hills where a bunch of kids jumped on the stage during the electric set chased by cops in and around the musicians.

The opening acoustic set was exactly the same as Forest Hills starting with "She Belongs To Me, and ending with "Mr. Tambourine Man." On the third song, "Gates of Eden," Dylan started coughing. After finishing the song, a guard brought out a glass of water and Dylan said, "Excuse me, I just got over a case of Leprosy." Watching him during the set, his face was stoic resembling the cover of *The Times, They Are A-Changin'*, except his hair was way longer.

When the band took the stage after intermission, the contrast between how they looked and how Dylan looked was somewhat astonishing. They were in suits and ties and had really short hair, which would grow as the tour continued. I had no idea who they were and Dylan didn't introduce them. At Forest Hills, the audience was so far from the stage that unless you had binoculars (which I didn't) it was pretty hard to tell what anyone looked like. Not long after the show, a friend had a program from the concert the night before had Carnegie Hall, which listed the musicians, under the heading: Levon & The Hawks. I then realized I'd seen Levon Helm and Robbie Robertson at Forest Hills, and also realized that they along with the organ player, Garth Hudson were on an album I had by blues singer John Hammond, *So Many Roads*.

There was a line of huge Fender amps that ran across the stage. They started with "Tombstone Blues," and it was probably the loudest thing I ever heard in my life. Since Dylan was holding down the rhythm, along with Helm on drums and Rich Danko on bass, it allowed remaining musicians, Richard Manuel on piano, Hudson on organ and Robbie Robertson to kind of have a free for all throughout the show.

The song that blew me away however came early in the show when Dylan pulled out, "Baby Let Me Follow You Down," from his first album. I went pretty crazy seeing that. I couldn't believe it. Of course years later, such surprises became pretty common and one of the main reasons to go see him, because you just never knew when he was gonna pull out something he hadn't played in years or never played.

Unlike Forest Hills, and the shows that happened later in the tour and around the world the following year, there was no booing. Also unlike Forest Hills, at Symphony Hall there was an encore, "Positively Fourth Street."

In the months after the show, I longed to hear that sound again. The following June, a single, "I Want You" was released and the flip-side was a live version of "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues" recorded in Liverpool just a few weeks before. I played it several times a day at top volume. But it would be at least four years until the Royal Albert Hall bootleg surfaced.

I didn't know it at the time but I wouldn't see Bob Dylan again until more than eight years later in January, 1974. For a few years, I wondered what happened to Levon & The Hawks. When Music From Big Pink was released three years later, I bought it without hearing it, without thinking about it. When The Band had their live New York City debut at the Fillmore East a year later, I was there, and little did I know I'd find myself backstage at one of their concerts a few months later.

Decades later through other strokes of luck, I'd have other front row seats at Dylan concerts and occasionally be up at the stage at some general admission shows. And though I've seen Dylan more than 100 times since, that night, that show in Newark remains kind of hard to beat.

Who wrote "Blowin' in the Wind"? Not Lorre Wyatt

Way back, in fact not long after I saw Pete Seeger sing those Freedom Songs and Dylan's "Hard Rain," while I was in camp in Maryland, my family moved to Millburn, NJ, a suburb about 20 miles southwest of Manhattan. Millburn was a very straight, for the most part, very Republican town, that included Short Hills, at the time the wealthiest place in New Jersey. We were anything but rich and were anything but Republicans. This was the year

I discovered Bob Dylan and it didn't take long before I learned about one Lorre Wyatt who had just graduated Millburn High School. Everyone in the town at that time believed, and many people still believe his story - that he was the real writer of "Blowin' in the Wind."

In November of that year, a week after JFK was shot, I saw Bob Dylan at the Mosque Theater in Newark, NJ for the first time. He sang quite a few songs that soon would appear on The Times They Are A-Changin', and other songs that wouldn't be released legitimately for decades, such as "Who Killed Davey Moore," "Walls of Redwing," and "Talkin' John Birch." The encore for the show was "With God on our Side." When he sang "Blowin' in the Wind," his intro was, "Here's the song Newsweek magazine said I didn't write."

Lorre Wyatt was a member of the Milburnaires, a high school activity folk group. They wore jackets and ties, were all men, and were one of those big groups with about ten members. They even made an album they put of themselves that had "Blowin' In The Wind" on it.

In October 1965, when Bob Dylan returned to the same theater in Newark, though the name had been changed to Symphony Hall, I bought a ticket on the

day of the concert, and it ended up being front row center. Seats had been added on stage and over the orchestra pit. The ticket said stage site on it, and until I was led to my seat, I thought I'd be sitting on the stage. After buying the ticket early in the afternoon, as I took my seat on the bus to go home, I saw a Cadillac limo heading back towards the theater, and what looked like a lot of hair in the back window. I didn't have enough money to get off the bus.

When I arrived at the theater that night, there were quite a few kids from my class in the lobby. This was a bit surprising, as Bob Dylan was pretty much universally despised in that town. But Dylan was now a rock 'n' roll star. "Like A Rolling Stone" had been a huge hit that summer, and "Positively 4th St." was the current hit, both receiving tons of airplay on the New York City Top 40 AM radio stations. Even though I'd lived there for two years, I was still the outcast out of town, and plus I was the longhair, anti-war freak. The term hippie wouldn't come into use until a couple of years later. Anyway, these kids, all wearing jackets and ties, said to me, (at my fourth Bob Dylan concert), "What are you doing here?" I responded, "The question is, what are you doing here?"

Somewhere around that time, Lorre Wyatt returned to Millburn to play a show in the high school cafeteria one Saturday night. I figured I'd go down and check him out. One of the songs he sang was Eric Andersen's "Take off Your Thirsty Boots." The song had not been released on album yet, but I'd seen Andersen sing it at Broadside Hoots at the Village Gate, and it was published in Broadside. I saw my chance. When Wyatt took a break, I approached him and said, "Mr. Wyatt, since you wrote such great songs as 'Blowin' In The Wind,' that song you sang, 'Thirsty Boots' or something, did you write that?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Like hell you did. Eric Andersen wrote that." The last thing Wyatt was expecting in Millburn was someone to know who Eric Andersen was. So then he says, "Oh, I thought you said 'Thirsty Blues.' I wrote a song called 'Thirsty Blues.' " The only problem was, he didn't sing any song called "Thirsty Blues" during his set.

Wyatt eventually recanted the whole "Blowin' in the Wind" story, would go on to have a minor folk singer songwriting career and get published in Broadside, sing on Pete Seeger's Clearwater ship, and even have Seeger record one of his songs.

Obviously '60s Revisited

Way back in the early 1960s, my brother and I would buy Bob Dylan songbooks. They would usually, though not always follow an album's release and be titled after the album title. These songbooks didn't always include all the songs that were on a specific album, and quite often they'd have another song or two, usually something we'd never heard. Both of us probably could have sat down at the piano, read the music and figured them out, but that was too much like school and music was our escape from that. Some of these songs appeared on records by other singers. Dave Van Ronk, Peter, Paul & Mary, and Pete Seeger

were probably the first to record unreleased Dylan songs, followed pretty quickly by Ian & Sylvia, Judy Collins and others. Then in 1964 (though the album may have not been released until early in '65), a singer named Hamilton Camp recorded a several previously unrecorded Dylan songs on an album named *Paths Of Victory*. All we knew at the time about Hamilton Camp, who like Dylan played guitar and harmonica simultaneously, was that he was previously known as Bob Camp and had recorded an album with folksinger Bob Gibson. Later on we found out Camp was also a (usually comic) actor, and pretty good too. Two songs from that album (not the Dylan songs) would get big time radio play a few years later. "Get Together" was a huge hit for the Youngbloods, and Camp's own "Pride of Man" would become an FM rock radio favorite in a version done by Quicksilver Messenger Service. Not long after Camp's album, Odetta released *Odetta Sings Dylan*, which had a couple more of these previously unheard songs.

When it was announced a couple of months ago that the ninth volume of The Bootleg Series would be The Witmark Demos, the groans of never satisfied Bob Dylan fans emanated on various online Dylan discussion forums. A couple of the songs had already been released on the first volume of The Bootleg Series, and many had had the bootlegged versions for years. But what the Witmark Demos (which also includes demos from Dylan's first publisher, Leeds Music) does is put all these songs together in one place for the first time on a legitimate release.

The reason for these demos is simple. Most songwriters working in folk, rock 'n' roll, country and western, and blues, when they write a song, they don't write it in musical notation. They write the lyrics and the guitar chords. Back then in order to get a song copyrighted, you had to send in a musical composition. Songwriters would go their publishers, sing into a tape recorder, and someone would then transcribe so it could be copyrighted and be published. (Sometime in the 1980s, the Library of Congress changed this so you could simply send in a recording with your application.) The songbooks that appeared would have the melody and guitar chords, but quite often the chords though they worked, were not what Dylan was actually playing. The demos were also used to send the songs to other singers for consideration.

Much like the DVD of Dylan's Newport Folk Festival performances, *The Other Side Of The Mirror* released a few years ago, The Witmark Demos shows Dylan's incredible growth as an artist in a three year period. And make no mistake; these are demos, rough in performance, rough in sound quality. Dylan often stops mid-song, makes corrections to the lyrics, some songs are unfinished. On a couple of tracks, I hear a sound that sounds like the sound of tape rubbing against a plastic tape reel.

Many of the songs reveal Woody Guthrie's influence, perhaps more than the songs that made it onto Dylan's album, not only lyrically but in spirit. The flashes of Dylan's poetic genius surface early, usually on the songs that made it to albums, such as "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall." Dylan's other great influence, the blues is also quite in evidence, and the songs find him toying with various

blues forms, sometimes extending into ragtime and jazz. Dave Van Ronk recorded one of these songs, "All Over You" with the Red Onion Jazz Band. It may have been the first Dylan cover recorded.

What makes many of these tracks interesting is that Dylan often sings with the conviction and intensity he showed in concert and in the recording studio. Sometimes you hear him being drawn in as a song progresses, and without really trying many of these tracks end up as performances even though they didn't have to be.

The album starts with the incomplete "Man On The Street," listed as fragment, which Dave Van Ronk would eventually record on his No Dirty Names album as "The Old Man." The melody is from an old folk song, "The Young Man Who Wouldn't Hoe Corn," I first heard Pete Seeger sing on a 10inch Folkways album of work songs called This Land Is My Land that featured a bunch of singers including Woody Guthrie and Cisco Houston. To this day, I'm not sure how "This Land Is Your Land" qualifies as a work song. In typical Folkways style, "Young Man" was listed on the cover as "Farming Song," though the real title was on the actual label. Dylan's penchant for borrowing melodies from other folk songs (also Woody Guthrie's favorite trick) is quite apparent, though by the time he reaches the later songs on this two-disc set, that starts to change as he moves further from not only Guthrie influenced lyrics, but from songs written to sound as well as seem like old folk songs. The Witmark Demos is not a release for a new Dylan fan, or to turn someone onto Dylan. Many of the songs appear in superior versions on his albums. However for those interested, what makes these versions worthwhile are the occasional lyric and guitar variations as well as a glimpse into his songwriting process in its earliest stages. Dylan's power, charm and humor are much in evidence despite recording in what was probably the most uninspirational setting possible. The package comes with a particularly well done booklet, with photocopies of early lyrics, copyright forms, the demos themselves and truly excellent liner notes by Colin Escott.

Up until some point in 1967 when the record industry announced it only going to manufacture stereo recordings, every album I owned was a mono record. In the '50s and '60s record stores that had the room to do so, had separate sections for mono and stereo. On major labels, mono records cost three bucks, and stereo four bucks. Smaller labels such as Vanguard and Elektra cost a dollar more. You could play a mono record on a stereo player, but you couldn't play a stereo album on a mono player. In 1963, my family moved from Philly to a town in Northern New Jersey. My brothers and I were all sent to different camps for the summer while the move took place. When we returned home, my step-brother presented my brother and I with albums for our birthdays which had happened over the summer. The albums were We Shall Overcome by Pete Seeger for me and The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan for my brother. Unfortunately they were in stereo, so we took them to the local record store to exchange them. The Dylan album was an easy exchange, but the Seeger album, even though it was on the same label, even though it was a pretty big album at the time, never came in.

This little weekly drama went on for four months, until one day early in January I walked in and there was *The Times They Are A-Changin'*. Immediately I asked the owner, can I have this instead? Years later when I started working in record stores and discovered it didn't take four months for records (especially on a major label like Columbia) to come in, I realized the owner of that store was a prick and never ordered the album.

Except for the fact that stereo existed, there was really no good reason to record a solo singer with a guitar in stereo, but Columbia and every other label did. Phil Spector, whose elaborate productions were way more than a singer and guitar thought there was no reason to record in stereo period. In Dylan's case, on his solo recordings, the voice would be in the middle, the guitar would dominate on one side with a little on the other and every once in a while a harp solo would appear in one speaker. When Dylan started recording with other musicians, there were vast differences in the mono and stereo versions, particularly on *Highway 61 Revisited* and most noticeably on *Blonde On Blonde*.

The Original Mono Recordings takes Dylan's first eight albums from Bob Dylan through John Wesley Harding and presents them in their original mono form, with replications of the original covers, including the slip cases. Included is a booklet with notes by Greil Marcus, the original release dates and when the recordings took place.

For those interested in sound and sound quality, or as in my case after more than 40 years, the original vinyl mono copies are a bit beat up, these are the versions of these Dylan albums to own. As good as the remasters issued in the early 2,000s were, there's something about the sound on these discs that finally seems right. According to the liner notes, these are the versions that Dylan himself preferred. Considering Dylan's numerous comments on digital recording I have no doubt this is true. All of this makes sense except that Dylan's live concerts are mixed in stereo.

My own experience with the differences in stereo and mono on these albums came when I was staying at someone's house, and noticed the stereo fadeouts on *Highway 61 Revisited* were longer. This particular copy of that album also had a "From A Buick Six" that was not the one on my record at home, which is a whole other story. My next experience was hearing "One Of Us Must Know" from *Blonde On Blonde* and hearing an organ solo that wasn't on the mono version. Okay, so some reading this may say, wait a minute, stuff you couldn't hear, longer fadeouts, what's wrong with that? Well, as a whole it doesn't mean better sound-wise.

There are numerous other differences between the mono and stereo versions, and again in the case of *Blonde On Blonde* often between individual copies as well as various versions in different countries. All of these differences in sound and mixes are noted in astonishing detail by a fellow from England named Roger Ford on his website *Electric Dylan*.

<http://www.rdf.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/>

Ford has collected copies of *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited*, and *Blonde On Blonde* from all over the world, and has analyzed them right down the matrix number on the vinyl recordings. The matrix number appears on the actual vinyl disc itself, scrawled into the vinyl between the final track and the label. The matrix number includes a key to when and where the album was pressed. On *Blonde On Blonde* a two-disc set, both discs did not necessarily come from the same pressing plant. And amazing as it seems, not every pressing plant pressed discs the same exact way.

When this set was announced, the Dylan fans who knew about this stuff waited to see if the mixes were actually the original mono mixes or something else. The organ solo, the longer fades, an obvious mistake by Robbie Robertson on "Visions Of Johanna," and a barely audible laugh by Dylan only on the mono version at the very end of "Desolation Row" were the key tests as to whether these were the true mono mixes. The box set has passed all.

Now this is not to say that the stereo versions don't have their own merits. They do. For instance "Fourth Time Around," where Dylan's rhythm guitar is very audible. While hearing that guitar puts another spin on things, having had the mono version basically ingrained in my mind for decades, there's something disconcerting about hearing it. It's not supposed to be a dominant part of the song, but on the stereo mix it is. At the same time, if there is one album that I would like to hear the original unmixed tracks, just to see what else may be there, it's *Blonde On Blonde*. There are a lot of guitars on that record and a lot of great guitarists, and one of the cool things about it was on the first several listens, you would hear something you didn't hear before.

The album I was most interested to hear in mono was *John Wesley Harding*, the first Dylan album I bought in stereo. For some reason this album never transferred well to CD, not even on the remastered version where Dylan's harp playing came off way too shrill. I was also concerned if Charlie McCoy's great bass parts as well as Kenny Buttrey's drums would have the same clarity as on the stereo vinyl. The mono mix captured all as well as the feel of that album's very singular sound makes this easily the best version of this album available on CD.

What you get on *Bringing It All Back Home* through *John Wesley Harding* is not only a much warmer sound, but the blend of the entire band heard as a cohesive whole.

The only time The Mono Recordings messes up is when it comes to the statistics at the end of booklet. While all the albums are presented in their original form in their original covers, the booklet has a track by track listing that simply isn't right. Dylan fans who care about who is playing what have argued about this stuff for years, and all this is going to do is start the arguments anew. On

Bringing It All Back Home, originally none of the studio musicians were credited period, and with the exception of guitarist Bruce Langhorne who appeared with Dylan before the album's release on the Les Crane Show on TV, and also has a very identifiable sound, it was years before anyone found out who the rest of the musicians were. On Highway 61 Revisited, the musicians and what they played were credited, but not a track by track listing. To be fair back then, studio musicians were rarely credited on albums, and track by track listings even rarer. On Blonde On Blonde, the musicians from the Nashville sessions were listed, but not what they played. One track, "One Of Us Must Know," was recorded prior to the Nashville sessions in New York, and included the two musicians who also took part in the Nashville sessions, Robbie Robertson and Al Kooper. In Sean Wilentz' recent book he credits (I believe correctly) the remaining musicians on that track as Paul Griffin, piano, Rick Danko, bass, and Bobby Gregg on drums.

The musician credits in the booklet confuse things totally. Charlie McCoy, who plays the great second guitar on "Desolation Row" isn't mentioned for that track at all. Robbie Robertson isn't listed for "Visions of Johanna," something I personally asked Al Kooper who plays organ on the track about several years ago. Then perhaps most baffling of all, there's a piano listed for "It's All Over Now Baby Blue." It ain't there, never was there.

Then there's the little problem of release dates. For some reason Columbia keeps listing the release date of Blonde On Blonde first on his official website and now in this book as being May 16, 1966. My suspicion is that was the originally scheduled release date, but if release date means when the album was in the stores, it wasn't. In the spring of '66 it was well known that Dylan had recorded a new album in Nashville. There were quite a few singles before its release. The last of those singles prior to the album was "I Want You." That single had a special surprise on the flip side, a live recording of "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues," recorded in Liverpool on May 14th. This was the first live Dylan track to appear on Columbia records. At that time, the only other live Dylan available were from the Newport Folk Festival in 1963 on Vanguard Records, and "Only A Pawn In Their Game" 1963 March On Washington For Jobs and Freedom on Folkways. I blasted that single at top volume on my mono record player several times a day waiting for Blonde On Blonde to come out. Another source for info on Dylan and other musicians was a weekly folk radio show I listened to every Sunday on the Princeton University station, WPRB by a guy named Jon Taplin. When Jon Taplin wasn't being a Princeton student, he worked for Dylan's manager Albert Grossman, who also managed several other folk acts. Taplin was the road manager for the Jim Kweskin Jug Band. A few years later he would be the road manager for The Band. Besides from playing great music, Taplin's between song commentary would include all kinds of fun inside info. I spent a lot of time hanging out in one of record stores in my town where the owner would let me read Billboard and Cashbox. Blonde On Blonde finally hit the stores at the end of June. I finally held in my hands in a record store in Times Square. I was on my way to summer camp to be a counselor-in-training. The album was to be my birthday present a few days later, so I held in my hands for several agonizing moments and left for camp.

Also perplexing is the December 1967 release date for John Wesley Harding. This was Dylan's first post motorcycle accident album. Since that time there's been way longer waits time-wise between Dylan albums, but emotionally that was the longest wait because of the accident. Unlike today, once the accident was announced on the radio and with was a two-inch article buried in the middle of the New York Times, saying that a concert at the Yale Bowl had been cancelled, you heard nothing. Today there would be horses of media camped out in Woodstock waiting for a glimpse, but things weren't quite so insane back then. The following spring a reporter for the New York Daily News tracked him down in Woodstock, and then nothing again until a small article in the Times saying Columbia had suspended his contract, and then an announcement he was finally recording in Nashville. In addition, new records are rarely released between Thanksgiving and Christmas. John Wesley Harding was actually in the stores immediately following January 1, 1968.

The booklet lists all the singles Dylan released during the time period of these eight albums. Between Highway 61 and Blonde On Blonde, Dylan released more singles than any time before or since. Two of those singles, "Positively 4th Street" and "Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window," are not on any of the albums, though the former is available as a download if you buy the set. According to the booklet, "Crawl Out Your Window" being released and recalled before "4th Street." One day in September 1965, when "Positively 4th Street" was a hit and getting lots of Top 40 radio play, a friend calls me and quickly says, "They just announced "Positively 4th Street," but it's a different song, and puts the phone to his radio so I can hear it. The song I heard was "Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window." A couple of months later the song was released, but I knew it wasn't the version I heard over the phone. About four or five years later, I finally heard that version again when I bought a bootleg called Stealin'.

Those quibbles aside, The Mono Recordings is a very good reason to revisit Dylan's most productive and prolific period of work.

Down in the Basement, but out of the Vault

It's late in 1968. Winter. I'm standing outside freezing on the steps of someone's apartment in Southwest Philadelphia. I just gave the guy in the apartment 25 bucks (a lot of money back then) to have him shut the door, leaving me hoping he'll come back with a reel of recording tape I'd spent months searching for. The experience was exactly like buying pot except most dealers let you inside for a taste. It turned out that purchase was the beginning of a quest that would continue for 46 years. On that tape were the 13 Bob Dylan songs an article in a then new magazine, Rolling Stone dubbed "The Basement Tapes."

Back up a year to November 1967. There had been no new music from Bob Dylan since his motorcycle accident on July 29, 1966. In May '67, a reporter from the New York Daily News found his house and briefly interviewed him. The following fall, the New York Times ran a couple of one-inch stories on the state of Dylan's contract with Columbia Records. Then one November night, New York folk DJ Jerry White debuted a single of a new Bob Dylan song done by Peter, Paul & Mary, "Too Much of Nothing." covered by Peter, Paul & Mary. The song was soon eclipsed by the news that Dylan had recorded a new album in Nashville, John Wesley Harding, that appeared in record stores on January 2, 1968. Not long after, Radio Unnameable host Bob Fass played a new Dylan song, "Down In The Flood," done amazingly enough by Flatt and Scruggs, and the next six months saw several new Dylan covers including Manfred Mann's hit, "The Mighty Quinn." In July Music From Big Pink by the group that had backed Dylan on tour in '65 and '66 had three more Dylan songs, two of them his first collaborations. One of the songs "This Wheel's On Fire" by Julie Driscoll, Brian Auger and The Trinity had already been a hit in England.

The tape I bought that day was generations removed from the original, the sound quality terrible, but the best songs had a scary intensity. While I was still delving into the songs, Dylan made a surprise TV appearance, his first since the crash, in a documentary on Johnny Cash show on National Educational Television, the predecessor to PBS. The shot was of a recording studio with Dylan and Cash facing each other on a duet of Dylan's "One Too Many Mornings" played to the Johnny Cash beat. Short haired, bearded, and chewing gum, Dylan sang with a voice no one had heard before. Deep and smooth, it was the voice that would appear on Nashville Skyline released a month later.

By then bootleg records had started to hit the East Coast, which for me meant no more reel to reel tapes. The most famous, Great White Wonder appeared in an unmarked white jacket with a blank label on the records itself. The album confused a lot of people because it featured seven Basement Tapes songs interspersed with outtakes from Bringing It All Back Home and Highway 61 Revisited and even earlier recordings.

A few years later, a few more songs leaked.. Then in the spring of 1975 on Mary Travers' radio show, Bob Dylan announced The Basement Tapes would be released. The album, a two-record set was controversial among Dylan's fans because it included songs by The Band as well, some that had nothing to do with the period in question, and a couple of songs had overdubs in attempt by Robbie Robertson and engineer Rob Fraboni to create a decent sounding '70s album.

Eleven years later, a friend visited from California brought with him two double-record bootlegs titled Blind Boy Grunt & The Hawks containing 43 additional tracks. Some were alternate versions, several songs were by The Band including a session with Tiny Tim. By this time bootlegs had artwork and liner notes. The big revelation was not only original songs were recorded. There were old folk and

blues songs, country and western songs and Curtis Mayfield's "People Get Ready."

Fast forward another ten years. It's now the '90s and suddenly there's a bunch of bootleg CDs titled *The Genuine Basement Tapes* or *After The Crash* and there's even more originals and covers. In 2001 two different companies issued a lavish four disc set complete with a booklet, liner notes and other goodies, *A Tree With Roots*. In 2009, another bootleg *Mixing Up The Medicine*, which was the Basement Safety masters in the best quality yet that was "liberated from the collection of Neil Young."

I would've thought that was it, but earlier this year I had a chance to talk to a person who is generally considered the supreme Dylan archivist who told me there's even more. The question of how much more was answered on August 26th when I woke up to an email from a friend titled, "Well, Alright!" The email was a link to an announcement that [The Basement Tapes Complete](#) was being issued on November 4th by Columbia Records as the 11th installment of The Bootleg Series. Six discs, 138 tracks, 30 of which never heard until now, the largest Bootleg Series so far, presented in chronological order without overdubs restored to sound as close to the original as possible.

So why the fuss about a bunch of recordings that mostly happened in the basement of a pink house in Saugerties New York, recorded with only a few microphones that were originally intended to be demos of new songs and nothing more?

There are some who would say and I'm one of them that these recordings contain some of the best singing Bob Dylan ever did in addition to being the missing link between [Blonde On Blonde](#) and John Wesley Harding and show a whole other side of the collaboration of Dylan and The Band, though this set only includes Dylan recordings.

The music can be put into three initial categories serious songs, funny songs and covers. But within those categories are subcategories. Some songs that start out sounding like a joke end up being serious. The covers include several traditional folk songs showing that while Dylan may have left the New York folk scene he did not by any means abandon folk music. There are covers of songs by Dylan's contemporaries from the folk scene including three Ian and Sylvia songs as well as Pete Seeger's "The Bells of Rhymney." There are also a couple of blues songs and a couple of old rock and roll songs. There is no indication that either Dylan or The Band were listening to any of the rock and roll or pop music that was happening in 1967. The inclusion of "Baby Ain't That Fine," by Dallas Frazier, a great songwriter best known for his country songs but who also straddled R&B possibly indicates that Dylan was more interested in what was coming out of Nashville and Memphis than England or San Francisco.

Levon Helm who had quit the Dylan tour in late 1965 had not yet returned when these recordings started. Most of the tracks have no drums though occasionally Richard Manuel or Robbie Robertson would play drums. Because no original notes were taken and because all the musicians were multi-instrumentalists there is no track by track listing of who plays what. The one constant throughout appears to be Rick Danko on bass.

When Levon and The Hawks joined Bob Dylan on the beyond chaotic world tour that actually started in the fall of '65, they were seasoned road musicians steeped in blues, R&B and rockabilly, but they were basically a bar band mostly playing in Canada with occasional trips to the South and elsewhere. They were thrown into one of the most chaotic tours in rock and roll history, traveling by plane instead of car, getting booed at almost every show playing behind a who who'd just reached stardom playing songs that while blues based at the core lyrically were nothing like the R&B covers they'd been playing.

Between press conferences, all night after show parties, with a constant entourage, they probably never really had a chance to know each other. The feeling of the majority of these recordings is of musicians getting to know each other by creating music and having a lot of fun in the process. The 13 songs from the original demo tape show that Dylan had stripped down his writing style. Most of the songs have three or four verses and wildly inventive choruses on which he is joined by Manuel or Danko singing harmony. Dylan would further strip things down for John Wesley Harding where all the songs with two exceptions had three verses and no chorus. Several of the tracks here are songs in progress. Some were completed, some abandoned. As with the other volumes of The Bootleg Series, it provides more than a glimpse of how Dylan creates. Some songs and early takes have dummy words until the real words appear. In some cases they never did. In other cases Dylan sings something that has the sound and feel of the word he's looking for. Some of the songs have verses that sound like nonsense with images that make no sense. There are times that Dylan and the guys in The Band crack up at the lines he just sang. But for all the nonsensical lines and images, is there really that much difference between "one bird book a buzzard and a crow" from "Tiny Montgomery" or a "tea preacher who looked so baffled" from Blonde On Blonde's "Memphis Blues Again"?

On the more serious songs, "Tears Of Rage," "I Shall Be Released," "This Wheel On Fire," "Too Much of Nothing," "I'm Not There," "Sign On The Cross" and "I'm Not There," there is a feeling that Dylan is not singing about earthly concerns. On these songs and several others, there's a sadness in his voice that simply wasn't there on his earlier recordings. On some songs that might seem initially nonsensical such as "Please Mrs. Henry," or "Open the Door Homer," there are images and verses that suggest a newfound spirituality. The last verse of the latter song begins:

"Take care of all your memories" Said my friend, Mick
"For you cannot relive them.

And remember when you're out there
Tryin' to heal the sick
That you must always
First forgive them."

The hysterical "Please Mrs. Henry," which on the surface sounds like a song about being drunk has these lines:

I'm a thousand years old and I'm a generous bomb
I'm t-boned and punctured
I've been known to be calm
I've spent a lot of time wondering whether bomb is really balm and who or what is t-boned and punctured and a thousand years old.
For all the serious songs, there's a lot of laughter, a lot parody and joking around, but also exploration but also a deep look at the broad musical influences of all involved.

With a set of this size it would take a book to do a track by track examination. Instead, some of my favorite tracks starting with the covers.

"The Auld Triangle" is one of the greatest Dylan recordings ever. Also known as "The Royal Canal," Brendan Behan wrote the song for his play "The Quare Fellow." It is one of the great prison songs and one of the great Irish songs. I've been listening to this song for about 20 years and rare is the time I can play it without playing it again. Dylan's voice is stunning as the Band fill in behind him clearly improvising creating a sort of folk rock sound with Garth Hudson alternating between harpsichord and organ. Dylan could have learned the song from the Clancy Brothers or Ian and Sylvia. Several Irish folk groups have recorded it.

"Spanish Is The Loving Tongue," probably learned from Ian Tyson, Dylan would record it again for the sessions of Self Portrait and New Morning eventually performing it once in San Antonio in 1976. Also in the ballad department, are two songs with Dylan playing 12-string, the Scottish whaling song, "Bonnie Ship The Diamond" and "Young But Daily Growing," a traditional English ballad with a Scottish connection. Both are terrific examples of why Dylan is one of the greatest folksingers of all time. "Young But Daily Growing" is one of the great examples of ballad singing by anyone.

Never bootlegged or heard until it was streamed on the internet last week is "900 Miles," a song I easily played at least 30 times before my copy of the set arrived. A total surprise, it is stunningly beautiful. The funny thing is it is not the traditional song "900 Miles." The melody is really "500 Miles," a song done by the Kingston Trio and Peter, Paul & Mary among many others. Dylan left out the "Lord, I'm one, Lord I'm two" part and clearly is making up the rest as he's singing, often singing words that aren't words. It doesn't matter. It hits you in the heart immediately.

Also up there are the three Ian and Sylvia songs, "Four Strong Winds," "The French Girl" and "Song For Canada," which appeared on boots under the title "One Single River." The special one is the 2nd take of "The French Girl" from Ian and Sylvia's Play One More album. Dylan passionately treats the song with the utmost respect. He would try it again years later in rehearsal with the Grateful Dead.

Another surprise cover is "Mr. Blue." Dylan sings the first verse and either Danko or Robertson laughs in acknowledgment. Dylan softly croons in a voice close to Nashville Skyline.

A major discovery are the songs that open Disc 5 which according to reports was actually recorded after most people thought The Basement Tapes were finished. There are three older Dylan songs, "Blowin' In The Wind," "One Too Many Mornings" and "It Ain't Me, Babe." Clearly present on drums on these songs is Levon Helm since all other instruments are accounted for. "Blowin' In The Wind" is done to a blues beat that almost turns into gospel by the end with Robertson really letting loose on the guitar solo. It is not anything like the version on Before The Flood. The total mind blower is "One Too Many Mornings." In an arrangement startlingly close to the way they did it in 1966, it starts with Richard Manuel singing the first verse. He blows a line but it doesn't matter. Danko and Dylan join him on the "behind" just like 1966. When Dylan comes in on the second verse it's holy shit time, and they pull off a key change for a guitar solo. While it's close it is not as strident and chaotic as the live version. "It Ain't Me Babe" is the most straightforward version that I know of performed with The Band.

Also on the disc 5 are two takes of "Ain't No More Cane," one of the Band songs from the released Basement Tapes and one they performed at their early concerts, only this time it's Dylan singing lead. I prefer the first take. There are also three songs with Dylan playing autoharp backed only by bass and someone possibly Richard Manuel on harmonica, "Wildwood Flower," "One Kind Favor," and "She'll Be Coming Round The Mountain." "One Kind Favor," is really Blind Lemon Jefferson's "See That My Grave Is Kept Clean," an unusual choice for autoharp. Singing the song way slower than his earlier version in a voice that's very close to Nashville Skyline, Dylan gets more into it with each verse.

The sixth disc is a bonus disc in which no attempt was made to clean up the sound. A few of the songs have previously appeared on bootlegs and the sound quality varies from track to track. It was included because these are the only recordings of these songs.

As amazing as many of the cover songs are it is the original songs and the way Dylan sings them that makes this set important along with the fact that for the first time they are finally all together in the order they were written and recorded.

On the beyond incredible “I’m Not There,” “This Wheel’s On Fire,” “Tears of Rage,” “I Shall Be Released,” “Too Much Of Nothing,” and the never before heard “Wild Wolf,” Dylan is in another zone entirely, one not of this earth. Decades ago when a friend who is deeply into the blues first heard Dylan’s version of “This Wheel’s On Fire,” he said, “Only Robert Johnson is this scary.”

The set, perhaps the most beautiful package of any Bootleg Series comes in a slipcase with one book containing the discs and liner notes designed to look like an old reel to reel tape box. There are three liner notes, the first by Sid Griffin who wrote a book on the recordings that was recently revived, “Million Dollar Bash,” deals with the songs and the music. The second by Dylan biographer Clinton Heylin is a detailed and dizzying history of the evolution of the various tapes, a totally wild tale. The third is by engineer Jan Haust who worked with Garth Hudson who originally recorded and archived the tapes on the restoration. The second is a book of photos of Dylan and The Band around the time of the recordings, pictures from the session for famed cover of the first Basement Tapes release, and pics of the various bootleg records, articles about them and memos from Columbia Records on what to do about them.

There is also a two disc version called The Basement Tapes Raw, but serious Dylan fans will want the box set.

In the four plus decades since Dylan and The Band recorded these songs, there’s been two books and innumerable articles about what went on that basement and following this release there will undoubtedly be many more. Many undoubtedly will say it was the beginning of what is now referred to as Americana Music. Dylan, who’s always been somewhat disparaging about the recordings answered that in a 1984 interview by Kurt Loder in Rolling Stone: “People have told me they think it’s very Americana and all that. I don’t know what they’re talkin’ about.”

I have to agree. In decades of listening to these recordings in varying quality what I’ve always heard is a singer sharing some of his favorite songs in hopes of finding the inspiration to create new ones. The joys and treasures of both can be found on these six discs.

The Banks of the Royal Canal (The Auld Triangle)

I first heard “Royal Canal” when I was a kid on an album I found in one of my uncle’s record collection called *Brendan Behan Sings Irish Folksongs and Ballads*. Behan was singing unaccompanied, and if I remember correctly was fairly drunk, and being about nine-years-old, I thought it was pretty funny at the time, but the song and another one called “Don’t Muck About With The Moon” stuck with me.

A few years later, older and with a growing interest in folk music, I heard the song again on Ian and Sylvia's *Four Strong Winds* album, and not long after another version recorded around the same time by Liam Clancy on his solo self-titled album released on Vanguard.

"Royal Canal," is a prison song, presumably written by Behan during his time in Mountjoy Prison. I use the word presumably because some have credited the song to Behan's Brendan's brother Dominick, best known for writing "The Patriot Game," the melody of which Dylan used for "With God On Our Side." "The Patriot Game" used the melody of another song, "The Merry Month Of May," which is a perfect illustration of how folk music works. On *Irish Folksongs and Ballads*, the song is listed as "The Old Triangle," but is also known as "The Auld Triangle," in addition to "The Banks Of The Royal Canal." Interestingly enough neither Ian or Sylvia or Liam Clancy credited the song to either Behan on their albums. Ian & Sylvia listed it as "traditional" while Clancy simply left it uncredited. For whatever reason no one at Vanguard Records which issued both albums noticed the discrepancy and apparently never bothered to check. According to the liner notes for the Ian and Sylvia album, they learned it from two Canadian singers who learned it from a record by folksinger and songwriter, Ewan MacColl who claimed he learned it directly from Behan. MacColl claimed Behan learned it while serving time in prison for being involved with the Irish Republican Army. According to MacColl's liner notes to the album he recorded with his wife, Peggy Seeger, *Bad Lads and Hard Cases*, MacColl states: "I learned this unusual prison song from the singing of Brendan Behan of Dublin. When I asked him where he had learned it, he answered, 'In Mountjoy.' 'And what were you doing there?', I asked him. 'Eight years,' he said, 'for shooting some detective sergeant or other, but praise be to God he was no countryman of ours.'"

Adding to the confusion, when Dominic Behan recorded the song on his eponymous album for the MajorMinor label in 1967, where it's listed as "The Old Triangle," he credits the song to Brendan Behan. On top of that, the song is melodically related to, though not entirely, the traditional song, "The Galway Shawl".

"The Old Triangle" was used in Behan's play about Mountjoy Prison, *The Quare Fellow* first staged in Dublin in 1954, sung by Behan himself from the wings on opening night, but the first known public performance was Behan singing it on the radio in 1952. At Mountjoy a triangle and a bell were used to signal all the various prison functions.

Bob Dylan probably learned "Royal Canal" from either Liam Clancy or Ian and Sylvia. He was friends with both, and the latter's *Four Strong Winds* album also included the first cover of his song "Tomorrow Is A Long Time." It is also quite possible that Dylan as I did heard Behan's album somewhere along the line as well. Since then the song has been recorded by just about every Irish group from the Dubliners to the Pogues.

"The Royal Canal" surfaced on the last bunch of "The Basement Tapes" to be leaked to bootleggers. The tapes were actually leaked over four decades. The initial tape was songs Dylan (or Albert Grossman) sent out to various artists to be recorded and included such songs as "The Mighty Quinn," "Too Much of Nothing," "Down In The Flood," "You Ain't Goin' Nowhere" and several others. The songs were quickly recorded, with Peter, Paul & Mary's "Too Much Of Nothing," being the first released, followed by Manfred Mann's "The Mighty Quinn," "Down In The Flood," by Flatt and Scruggs and several others. Ian and Sylvia recorded "This Wheels On Fire" and "The Mighty Quinn," on their Nashville album on Vanguard and "Tears of Rage" on Full Circle on MGM. Songs such as

"I'm Not There" and "Sign On The Cross" surfaced sometime in the '70s. The official release which included some different takes from the first tape as well as a song no one knew about "Goin' To Acapulco," appeared in 1975. In the '80s, two double LPs appeared that not only included more originals, but covers of old folk, country and blues songs, but also some Band originals, and sessions The Band did with Tiny Tim, of which two songs were used for the film, *You Are What You Eat*. One of the songs on those LPs, was Ian Tyson's "Song For Canada," which appeared in 1965 on their *Early Morning Rain* album. On the boots it was mislabeled as "One Single River." The last batch of songs which surface in the late '80s and early '90s found a similar mix of covers and originals, including a couple of more Ian and Sylvia songs, as well as a few Irish and English ballads thrown in for good measure. So in between *Blonde On Blonde* and *John Wesley Harding*, in addition to writing enough songs to fill up several albums, Dylan and The Band also recorded a good deal of what is now referred to as roots music.

One of those Irish songs was "The Royal Canal." Aside from the fact that song has great lyrics and a beautiful melody, which accounts for so many performers doing it, Dylan's singing is effortless and natural. You pretty much get the feeling he could be singing it in his living room, which for all intents and purposes he basically was. Playing a straightforward rhythm on 12-string guitar (both Clancy and Ian & Sylvia used 12-string on their recordings), his singing is equally straightforward. There are no excesses or mannerisms. It is all heart. Apparently there was only one take as at the end Dylan says, "Alright, let's try this one," and moves onto the next song. One of the things that makes this a great recording is Dylan starts alone, followed by Robbie Robertson and slowly the rest of the group (which at that time was minus drummer Levon Helm) join or more accurately find their way in. At first Robertson tried mandolin licks on the guitar, but changes that pretty quickly. Keyboardist adds a clavinet that has a harpsichord feel, so the middle part almost sounds like classic folk rock, then Robertson switches more to single notes, kind of sounding like Bruce Langhorne's great guitar part on "Mr. Tambourine Man," before finally going with his own unique brand of guitar bends, as Hudson as apparently abandoned the clavinet for much straighter organ part. By the time the song ends, either Manuel or Danko, who had pretty much kept their piano and bass respectively out of the way of Robertson and Hudson, is singing along on the chorus. One can only imagine what they might have come up with had Dylan decided to go for a second take.

It is a fairly long song, nearly five and a half minutes, and Dylan gets more passionate with each verse, yet always remains the storyteller. It is easy to imagine a damp, dank, dreary prison as he sings. On one of the pivotal verses, *In the female prison/There are 70 women/And it's with all of them/I would like to dwell*, where Clancy performs this has high drama, Dylan lets the song do the work for him. What's very clear from this recording is that Dylan loves this song, and with its use of internal rhyme, setting the scene for as well as relaying the story, all things he is a master of, it's no small wonder that he does.

Is John Wesley Hardin Dylan's greatest album?

I always thought the album after John Wesley Harding would be something like what eventually turned out to be *Slow Train Coming*. However, Bob Dylan went in an entirely different direction with *Nashville Skyline* and there was a certain craftsmanship that went into the songs that became *Nashville Skyline*. A certain songwriting craftsmanship. The songs on that album aren't even really country songs for the most part, not by Nashville standards at the time. There's no double meanings, there's no varying levels of thought, though you can read them in if you want to.

For Dylan, John Wesley Harding might have been just a simple exercise creatively speaking to see if he could write a plain song. Obviously, he didn't stay with it very long, though a lot of, but not all of the songs on *New Morning* could be taken in the same light, though by that album some of the natural mystery inherent in his writing had crept back in. I've always looked on "*New Morning*" as his piano album but that may be just how the sessions ended up working out and had those songs had been done with The Byrds as originally planned, it might have been completely different.

As for John Wesley Harding it is definitely not a rock album. It's an album coming from another place entirely, an album that paints a landscape, a very American landscape. Throughout the album the various characters are seeking some kind of salvation, and at the conclusion of the album, the suggestion is that maybe the salvation is in love.

The celebration is at the end of the album. The plain and simple triumph of "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight." After the soul searching, I really do not find much angst on the album, he realizes that maybe all there is, all that's important is to see your true love coming your way. The album is relentless and it's supposed to be that way. Life itself is relentless. That's one of the reasons it's a great album.

The Basement Tapes songs were the bridge Dylan had to cross over to get to John Wesley Harding and I feel the same way about *Planet Waves*, the bridge to *Blood On The Tracks*. The Basement Tapes songs were often improvised or partially improvised, while John Wesley Harding is a finished work and very on-purpose. It is about the economy of writing, and using a similar tone in the songs to create a different kind of whole. Another bridge is the coat he wears on John Wesley Harding. It's the same one as Blonde on Blonde and *Nashville Skyline*. Look at the longer version of the *Nashville Skyline* photo in photographer Elliot Landy's book, "*Woodstock Visions*." The coat is not black, on Blonde on Blonde the collar is up, while on *Nashville Skyline* the collar is down, but in typical Dylan style rather rumpled making it difficult to compare, and in this version of the picture (3), the material does appear to be suede.

Finding the Beatles on the cover can be seen much better with an LP and a magnifying glass really helps though it is not necessary. There are also pictures further up in the leaves of the tree as well. The person wearing the scarf, is either Purna or Luxman Das of the group the Bauls of Bengal (aka the Bengali Bauls).

The Bauls were a street group from Calcutta. The word Baul means (to quote Al Aronowitz from the liner notes to the album Bengali Bauls at Big Pink): "madcap, handed down through the ages like a fool's scepter, defying injunctions, canons customs and rules....Bauls deliberately wear the garments of both the Hindus and the Moslems, no small provocation in a country where insanity is called 'the wind disease.' Only a few years ago, India looked at the Bauls like punchlines walking around in search of a joke. Now their music is considered a national treasure."

"...The Bauls cut across the lines that divide Hindu from Moslem and

invite all the lowly to join them. Are the Bauls a religion? The

street is their place of worship. God is in their Man of the Heart...."

A lot more information on them can be found in the liner notes to Bengali Bauls at Big Pink once available on Buddah Records and recorded in a certain basement by one Garth Hudson in December of 1967.

One of the keys to John Wesley Harding is how concise everything is. The song construction with the exception of "Frankie Lee and Judas Priest" is close to universal throughout. No choruses and three verses. Only "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight" has a bridge. Only the final two songs sort of pointed towards "Nashville Skyline." The rest of the album (like the songs on the Basement Tapes) could have led anywhere.

But the song John Wesley Harding is perhaps the most concise of all. It actually does tell a story, as much a story as the writer wants to reveal anyway, and it sets the tone for the record, leaving you with a sense of mystery and a bunch of questions. I believe it is that way totally on purpose. For one thing he knew the outlaw's name was Hardin, not Harding. Therefore the song is not about the outlaw. It's about a fictional character, the mythical everyman outlaw captured in songs such as Jesse James or Guthrie's "Pretty Boy Floyd."

For those of us who were around back then, John Wesley Harding was released in totally different circumstances. Nothing had been heard from Dylan for over a year-and-a-half. So for one thing there was the initial joy at just having him back, but no one had any idea what to expect. These days those 18 months of waiting might seem like a small thing, but at the time it was somewhat torturous.

Dylan said in regards to those sessions in a Rolling Stone interview, that he was trying to get the same sound Gordon Lightfoot got with the same musicians but it came out different. I do believe part of that. It would have been a different album that's for sure. It might have been lesser, might not have been, it's hard to say. The playing by Charlie McCoy and Kenny Buttrey is brilliant and it's some of the best guitar and harp work Dylan has ever done and some of his best singing as well. In an interview some time after the album came out, Robbie Robertson said "Bob came back with the tapes and said 'Can you do the guitar and Garth the organ,' but I thought it was too small-time."

According to Happy Traum in the Sing Out! interview with Bob Dylan of 1968, Pete Seeger liked to ice skate to the John Wesley Harding album and Bob's reaction was, "I'm glad he feels that way about it."

There are many many songs that have the same melody that Dylan used for "I Pity The Poor Immigrant." Dylan himself used the melody before for "The Ballad of Donald White." Although this time I believe he said he got the tune from "The Ballad of Peter Ambery" by Canadian folksinger Bonnie Dobson, who wrote the classic "Morning Dew." The liner notes of the Dobson album say the song is based on the Scottish ballad, "Tramps & Hawkers." This melody was also used for another traditional song Dylan performed live in the early '90s, "Banks of Ponchartrain."

As for "I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine" and borrowing from Earl Robinson's "Joe Hill," when the John Wesley Harding album came out at the end of 1967, I believe everyone who had heard "Joe Hill" noticed that immediately, though that is the only similarity. The only thing Dylan borrowed from the song "Joe Hill" was the first line replacing "Joe Hill" with St. Augustine. After the first line, the melody and lyrics differ quite a bit and I have no doubt that Dylan knew exactly what he was doing. The first time I heard the song I immediately thought "Joe Hill." It was a famous song even before Joan Baez did it, and if memory serves me well her record of it didn't appear till after John Wesley Harding was released. The person who really made the song famous was Paul Robeson. A pretty brilliant interpretation of 'I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine' in Guerrilla Minstrels by Wayne Hampton is that the song was inspired by the death of Woody Guthrie. Guthrie died the fall the album was recorded, October 3rd 1967, so it's just a matter of when Dylan wrote the song. He recorded it on October 17th, 1967. It makes a lot of sense especially if you take into account the second verse. Guthrie's was most certainly "a voice without restraint."

I had John Wesley Harding for 12 years before I figured out what "I Pity The Poor Immigrant" was about. None of the interpretations that I read in any of the reviews of the album made any sense. Robert Shelton said it was about Vietnam, others thought it was about immigrants coming to America. After Slow Train Coming came out (an album I'd been expecting ever since, though I thought it would be more like Passolini's *Gospel According To Saint Matthew*), I decided I better find out about this shit and so I started reading the Bible cover to cover starting of course with the Old Testament. Lo and behold in the Old Testament in Leviticus during exodus there's this section called the Blessings of Obedience, where Moses goes up on the mountain and talks to God. The Jews are in the desert fleeing Egypt but they're messing up. Right there in that very scene God tells Moses that if they don't start acting right and believing in him and paying attention to him, "I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass" (26.19), "your strength shall be spent in vain" (26.20), "and ye shall eat and not be satisfied" (26.26). Now I understand the song. The "I" isn't Dylan, the "I" is God, and the immigrant is the Jews in the desert during Exodus. What kind of person writes a song from that perspective where the "I" is God?". In the interview Dylan gave to Happy Traum in Sing Out magazine in 1968, he says 'I'm not in the songs', the 'I is another'. And he has maintained that about that album throughout in all of the interviews. More than 20 years later when he did the Song Talk interview with Paul Zollo he said the same thing, so he's remained consistent.

I'd be willing to bet the "I" in "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight" is him, as well as the "I" who saw my true love coming way way in "Down Along The Cove." Although the bundle of joy

could be Moses. I doubt the "I" in "I Am A Lonesome Hobo" is him either. On the other hand, the "I" in "As I Went Out One Morning" is somewhat debatable. Then again, the "I" in "I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine" is totally a matter of speculation. The funny thing is for an album where he is not in the songs, he sure uses "I" a lot.

Over the decades a lot of consideration has been given to just who Frankie Lee is or whether Judas Priest is also the Landlord. Some might say that Judas Priest and Frankie Lee are really two sides of the same person, but the most important question is where does the Little Neighbor Boy fit in, and not only that, does he have any Judas Priest albums? Frankie Lee could be the same Frank as in Frank & Vera. Maybe Terry Shute is really the little neighbor boy. There really is a Frankie Lee who is a pretty good though very unknown soul singer from New York who sometimes performs with a Turbaned blues singer named Sonny Rhodes. But I don't think that Frankie Lee met that Judas Priest except for maybe when he tried to collect the royalties for his album.

Given all that it is probably safe to say that Bob is neither the Escaped Drifter or the Wicked Messenger, though the Judge could be the Hanging Judge in "Lily Rosemary & The Jack of Hearts," but he could also be the Cream Judge as in Cream Judge & The Clown. However, possibly the most important question concerning this album (other than are those little pictures really there in the tree) is whether the author really did add the "g" to Harding to make up for all those early apostrophes.

John Wesley Harding is one of my top favorite Dylan albums and it may even make more sense now. It may well be his greatest album.

Dear Mrs Roosevelt

On January 20, 1968, Bob Dylan stepped onto a stage and played before an audience for the first time since May 27, 1966, the final stop of his world tour at the Royal Albert Hall in London. The stage was that of Carnegie Hall, where Dylan had last appeared in October of 1965, his last appearance in New York City. The occasion was not a Bob Dylan concert, but a tribute to Dylan's acknowledged primary influence, Woody Guthrie. On stage with Dylan were several folk music musicians from his earliest days in New York including Pete Seeger, Tom Paxton, Odetta and Ramblin' Jack Elliott. The concert was a scripted affair, the script written by Millard Lampell who had been in the Almanac Singers with Guthrie. Based on and including segments from Guthrie's writings, it served to introduce the songs and was narrated by actors Will Geer and Robert Ryan.

Dylan appeared backed by the same group who had backed him at his last appearance at Carnegie, then known as Levon & The Hawks, and for this concert according to some accounts were called The Crackers, before their final incarnation as The Band. Dylan however was not alone in having a band for the two concerts in the afternoon and evening. Guthrie's son Arlo also appeared with a band featuring the now legendary Ry Cooder, who a few years later on his own albums would cast Guthrie's songs into a more modern musical context. Guthrie's songs proved to be easily adaptable to being rocked up.

Dylan chose two fairly well-known Guthrie songs, "I Ain't Got No Home," one of Guthrie's "Dust Bowl Ballads," and "The Grand Coulee Dam," which Guthrie wrote when he was hired by the Columbia River Power Administration to write songs promoting the project. The third song, "Dear Mrs. Roosevelt," had people intrigued as it was not on any Guthrie album, nor had anyone else recorded it.

Writing about the performance in the *New York Times* and later in his biography of Dylan, "No Direction Home," the Times' folk music critic, Robert Shelton, the man who wrote the first major review of Dylan and for all intents and purposes can be credited with discovering Dylan called the performance and arrangements rockabilly. Rockabilly influenced perhaps would be a more accurate description, though the music Dylan and company played that afternoon was not rockabilly in the sense of Eddie Cochran or Carl Perkins, and while it certainly rocked, it was not rock 'n' roll either. What it actually was as people would find out later in the year when underground tapes started surfacing the unique music Dylan and The Band had been creating in seclusion in Woodstock during the previous year. And while none of these songs appear on any of the "Basement Tapes" yet to surface, the sound and feel is as close as one could possibly get. This never happened again, with the exception of one song, "Minstrel Boy," performed at Dylan's Isle of Wight concert a year and a half later, though one exception could possibly be Dylan's surprise guest appearance with The Band earlier in the summer of '69 in Edwardsville, Missouri. If a recording of Edwardsville exists, it has yet to surface.

One of the things that made these performances stand out, was The Band's three lead singers, Richard Manuel, Rick Danko and Levon Helm providing harmony on the choruses. Up until this point, as far as anyone knew at the time, the only harmony they had previously provided in backing Dylan was Rick Danko singing one word "behind" on the 1966 rearrangement of "One Too Many Mornings."

Of the three songs, "Dear Mrs. Roosevelt" is the most and also most carefully arranged. The chords and parts of the melody are not exactly Guthrie-esque, though I could imagine Guthrie singing it in his usual straight three-chord pattern. One of the interesting aspects of this arrangement is that on a few verses the song key modulates up a half-step, a favorite trick of Country And Western singers usually done for added impact.

Dylan is in excellent vocal form here, singing in pretty much the same voice he used to record *John Wesley Harding* a couple of months earlier and the song kind of echoes "Dear Landlord" in feel. At several points in the song his is both sailing over the melody and truly wailing out key lines, emphasizing key lines of the story as well as the history in the song, with additional emphasis added on any lines connected by topic to other Guthrie songs or other themes of songs coming from folk music.

On the first two verses Dylan is simply telling a story, Guthrie's unique biography of Roosevelt in the form a letter to his widow, but as the songs progresses and delves into what Roosevelt accomplished Dylan's phrasing and intensity become more intense, starting with the line, "He loved the folks who wished him well and everybody did," where each word is pronounced. Similarly the last line of the following verse, "You money changing racket boys sure enough got to fall" equally sails.

On the next first however, with the first key change, the song truly shifts into another territory with the verse:

I voted for him lots of times/I'd vote for him again.

He tried to find an honest job for every idol man.

Dylan almost shouts out the last line of that verse, and between each verse The Band provides an almost gospel feel on the chorus, *This world was lucky to see him born.*

The key goes up again for the next verse, which starts *He helped me to build my union*, Dylan sings it as if he's remembering and incorporating every union song that Guthrie wrote and every union song that's ever been sung at strikes, in union halls and at rallies in the entire history of the country. Then when he sings the verse's concluding line, *I could see he was a cripple, but he learned my soul to talk*, even though he messed up and that last word should actually be walk, it doesn't matter, it's one of the truly remarkable examples of Dylan's power as a singer.

The song shifts keys yet again for the final verse,

I was a GI in the army the day he passed away.

And over my shoulder, I could hear some soldier say

which immediately returns to the chorus, *This world was lucky to see him born.*

At this point, Dylan is totally soaring, as if the song is singing him, and you can visualize World War II photos of the troops.

The song then reverts back to its original key for a half gospel, half honky-tonk piano solo, before Dylan and the band repeat the chorus with an added, *I know (this world was lucky just to see him born*, a few times before a final *This world was lucky to see him born* ending in a perfect barbershop harmony on the final word and note.

Wild Mountain Thyme

"Wild Mountain Thyme" is a song Bob Dylan has been playing and singing on and off for most of his career, though it was nine years from the first known performance until he sang on stage. The first known recording of him doing the song was at a friend's house in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1961.

"Wild Mountain Thyme" is unique in that it sounds so much like an ancient Irish folksong that a lot of people think it is one. It was written by William McPeake and recorded by him in 1957, and then by his more famous family, The McPeake Family of Belfast in 1961. The song is probably based on or at the very least connected to "The Braes of Balquhider," written by Robert Tannahill either in the late 18th or early 19th Century. The song has been recorded and performed by dozens of singers, especially those connected with the '60s folk music movement, including The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, Judy Collins, Joan Baez, The Byrds, and much later Van Morrison (as "Purple

Heather) and Mark Knopfler. It is a song that is so haunting in its lyrical and melodic beauty, that I've never heard a bad version.

The next known version of Dylan doing the song was in 1965, and released in the outtakes of the film *Don't Look Back*. It is another of the songs from the hotel scene which in the original film, Dylan is writing at the typewriter and Baez is singing. They then start playing together "Lost Highway," a song best known by Hank Williams though he did not write it. Ten years later the two would revive the duet for the first Rolling Thunder Tour, and reprised it again the following year. Dylan would later perform it on some of the first shows of what has become known as the "Never Ending Tour" in 1988.

In 1971, I was visiting a friend in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and to my delight, there was a bootleg record of Dylan's 1969 concert at the Isle of Wight among the records in her house. The Isle of Wight was Dylan's first full concert following his motorcycle crash in 1966. The Bob Dylan who played the Isle of Wight was not quite the same Bob Dylan who had left England, wasted, exhausted, disillusioned and clearly strung out three years before. Where as the Dylan of 1966 was appearance wise all angles in bizarre checked suits, the Dylan who played Isle of Wight was now a family man, apparently more relaxed and dressed in a white suit that was closer to something a pop singer might wear in a night club as opposed to the absurdist poet laureate of rock or any of his folksinger incarnations prepared to deliver a nice summer evening concert before the largest audience he'd ever played for, an audience comprised not only of worshipful hippies whom he despised, but several members of the British rock star elite including most of The Beatles.

The Isle of Wight had its own set of controversies from Dylan's reported salary, to a press conference where he seemed more like a businessman than the world's most prominent singer-songwriter to the amount of time he actually was onstage, which was basically an hour. The last point may have been because they're were technical and sound problems immediately before The Band's set which delayed the proceedings considerably and reportedly left Dylan not exactly thrilled. Either way, it would be another long four and a half years before he played a full concert again.

A few songs from the concert had been released the previous year on Dylan's hodgepodge *Self Portrait* album, which on one level seemed to be his own version of the numerous bootlegs that had surfaced over the previous few years. Those tracks were not particularly encouraging, and the intensity and force Dylan and the Hawks had displayed in 1966 were apparently gone. Because the live tracks were mixed in with various other tracks recorded in studios in Nashville and New York, it wasn't easy to get a feel for what the concert was like as a whole. "Like A Rolling Stone," for example was stripped of its original intent and sung as a distant memory, with some lyrics either forgotten or deliberately changed ("The mystery tramp with the apple in his eye). All of this was had more to do with Dylan than The Band who were playing with their usual force and vigor.

The bootleg I heard that afternoon was of dubious sound quality, and while the tracks with The Band were close to unlistenable in terms of sound quality with distortion running rampant, Dylan's short four-song solo acoustic set was a bit more audible. Dylan opened the acoustic portion of the show with "Wild Mountain Thyme," and as I listened I couldn't believe it. At the song's end, I immediately put the needle back at the beginning of the track, and played it again and again after that. He had never sung quite that way

before and hasn't since. The Isle of Wight show was sung in what's most easily described as his *Nashville Skyline* voice. The Nashville Skyline voice was a clear baritone that at times seemed to lend itself to a sort of crooning. In typical Dylan style, this voice was first revealed not on an album, but on a Johnny Cash documentary film, *Johnny Cash: A Man And His Music*, that was broadcast on public TV in the US on the National Educational Television Network (the predecessor to PBS) early that winter a few weeks before *Nashville Skyline* was released. Dylan's appearance on the show was not well publicized, but word got out that he might be on it. Dylan's only public appearance before this was at the Woody Guthrie Memorial Concerts at Carnegie Hall which sold out instantly, so for many fans, this was the first chance to see Dylan after the bike crash. When he finally appeared without warning about a quarter of the way into the film, it was to say the least a shock. Filmed in a Nashville recording studio, facing each other over a barricade of microphones, Dylan and Cash sang "One Too Many Mornings" to the classic Johnny Cash book chicka boom beat. Too add to the suspense, Cash sang the first verse. When Dylan came in on the second verse, chewing gum and for all intents and purposes crooning, "From the crossroads of my doorstep, my eyes begin to fade, a collective "what?" was both heard and felt in the room. Stunned does not begin to describe the reaction, and when *Nashville Skyline* was released a month or so later, it became clear a major readjustment was in order if this was going to be his vocal style from that point on, and Dylan's appearance on the debut of the *Johnny Cash Show* on TV that June did little to dispel that notion. Not long after the album came out, Dylan's mother was quoted as saying something along the lines of that's his real voice. At the time, I took that comment with a grain of salt. However, almost 30 years later, I was driving home from another trip to Massachusetts and listening to a tape someone had given me of Dylan singing the ballad, "The Two Sisters." The voice was very close to that of *Nashville Skyline*. Since I was driving, I couldn't look at the info my friend gave me to see where the recording was from, and I thought it was some bad quality tape from 1969. When I finally arrived home, and the next day looked to see where the recording was from, I was astounded to find out it was from 1960. The first thing I thought of was the comment by Dylan's mother.

Unlike a lot of folksingers, Dylan's approach to "Wild Mountain Thyme" was not one of sacred reverence as if the song was a rare antique piece of china not to be handled. He played it at a gentle moderate rhythm not unlike "Love Minus Zero/No Limit," in other words, a typical Dylan acoustic medium rocking beat, complete with a stop after the first chorus. It is his vocal that makes this performance so incredible. Rarely has Dylan sung so sweetly, but it is not only the sweetness, it's as if he stepped out of himself perhaps to another planet. Various words and lines in the song are emphasized, some repeatedly, but not with the sometimes harsh stretched out emphasis that every Dylan imitator in the world uses in exaggerated fashion. Instead the emphasis is on melody and singing in and around each note as if he has suddenly discovered the pure joy of singing. Every time he gets to the word wild, his voice gets wild, but in a way that is unique to this one performance as if he's singing every possible note he can in and around that one word and in that one word you suddenly envision a mountain of wild blooming flowers, and each time he sings the word, it seems to get more wild. A similar intensity of phrasing also happens on the third verse which goes:

I will build my love a tower/At the foot of the fountain

And on it I will put/All the flowers of the mountain.

When he sings “And on it I will put all the flowers of the mountain,” it is sung in such a way with first the emphasis on the I, which runs crazily down a melodic scale, that he really will put *all* the flowers of the mountain.

At the end he adds a verse, “The summertime is comin’, and the wee birds are sweetly singin’,” as if he has to keep the song going savoring the moment. Ultimately, this has to be heard to be appreciated.

Looking Back On Nashville Skyline After 40 (50) Years

This started out not as an article, but a semi-comical post to the Bob Dylan forum at the Never Ending Pool website. A lot of people like it, so I decided to include it here Peter Stone Brown 2009

It was a bright, sunny late winter or early spring, or somewhere in-between day when *Nashville Skyline* found its way to the browsers of record stores. I first heard it in a store on the upper west side of Manhattan, at 115th Street and Broadway, where a bunch of people were hanging around, clutching the copies they were about to buy for three dollars and ninety-nine cents.

A lot of people were wondering what happened to Bob’s voice, as it had turned from well, Bob’s voice into this smooth, crooning baritone or something. Now some people, myself included, had already been through that shock a month or so before when National Educational Television (the predecessor to PBS) aired the documentary, *Johnny Cash, the Man & His Music*, which later that year would be released to movie theaters. Midway through the film (which by the way is quite good), a gum chewing Bob Dylan suddenly appears behind a barricade of microphones and let loose with *that* voice on the second verse of “One Too Many Mornings,” causing Dylan fans everywhere to say, what the hell was that? Actually they didn’t say what the hell, they said something else.

Now you have to keep in mind that most people hadn’t seen Bob Dylan since 1966 or even 1965, unless they went to the Woody Guthrie Memorial Concert at Carnegie Hall, and the tickets for that sold out before most people knew they were even on sale. So a lot of people who saw that TV show were left wandering the streets and wondering if they really

saw and heard what they saw until *Nashville Skyline* was released, which only left them wondering if maybe this was gonna be the way it was forever. Not long after that, some reporter caught up with Dylan's mom, who said, "Oh that's his real voice, that's the way he always sang." Not many people believed that, but it turned out, like moms usually are, that she was right, because a couple of decades later, a tape recorded about a year before Bob Dylan had a recording contract appeared that well, found him singing some old English ballads in that very voice.

There were many significant things about *Nashville Skyline*. It was the second Bob Dylan album to have nothing printed on the front cover, and not only that, he was wearing the same suede jacket that he wore not only on *John Wesley Harding*, but on *Blonde On Blonde*. But it was the last time that jacket would appear on a Bob Dylan album cover, so far anyway. (Note for the hardcore completist, European compilation albums don't count in this regard.)

Another thing about *Nashville Skyline* was there more people involved in making it named Charles (or Charlie as the case may be) than any Bob Dylan album before or since. There was Charlie McCoy who has appeared on more Bob Dylan albums than anyone except for Al Kooper, Charlie Daniels, who would later be known for wearing big hats, playing the fiddle and right-wing political rants, and Charlie Bragg the engineer. There were also three Bob's involved. There was Bob Dylan himself of course, Bob "I just let the tapes roll" Johnston the producer, and Bob Wilson the piano player.

Unlike the previous album, there were no tiny little pictures of Beatles hidden in the bark of the tree or even the leaves of the tree which in this case are pretty sparse, though some say the Gibson J-200 that Dylan is holding on the cover, belonged to a Beatle, namely George Harrison, even though it pretty much looks like a standard Gibson J-200. The album also features a Johnny Cash poem of sorts written by Johnny Cash, which he ends, by saying, "Herein is a hell of a poet," which is pretty funny because it was the least poetic collection of original songs Bob Dylan had released at that point. [Not long after, Dylan would write a parody of sorts of those notes for Eric Von Schmidt's album, *Who Knocked The Brains Out The Sky?* where he wrote: "He can separate the men from the boys and the note from the noise. The bridle from the saddle and the cow from the cattle. He can play the tune of the moon. The why of the sky and the commotion of the ocean."

Anyway, some people spent a lot of time searching the *Nashville Skyline* lyrics for greater significance. Some wondered if Little Jack Horner was really Little Jack Horner, or whether not throwing a pie up in anyone's face was an allusion to Dylan leaving the revolution he never was part of, or if love really was all there is. Someone I know thought that the most meaningful line on the album was, "I could not be what she wanted me to be."

Some people immediately moved to the country, started heating brown rice and took courses on using a wood stove. Musicians, especially those from California, threw away their fuzz boxes, and had their album covers taken on frumpy porches and wrote songs about pickin' and grinnin' and country livin'.

Meanwhile for those who keep track of such things, *Nashville Skyline* began Dylan's phase of releasing albums with two word titles, which would continue (not counting soundtracks) for his next three albums. The next such phase would be his "S" period which began in 1978.

However, one of the most interesting things about *Nashville Skyline*, despite it's prompting lots of musicians to enter what became known for better or worse as country rock, is that few of the songs on it are actually county song structurally or literally. Not one song has a chorus, not one song has a "hook line," which was prevalent in Nashville songwriting at the time. Only "One More Night" comes close to country music structurally or chord-wise. Structurally the songs are much closer to the music of Memphis, and also the stuff Charlie Rich was recording at the time for Smash Records, which was much closer to R&B than country. Years later Rich would emerge for a few years as a country artist, though he eventually went back to his first loves, R&B and jazz. But if you check out some of Rich's recordings at the time of *Nashville Skyline*, musically and vocally, that is probably what Dylan was aiming for, realized in the album's best tracks, "I Threw It All Away," "Lay Lady Lay" and "Tonight I'll Be Staying Here With You."

However, *Nashville Skyline* does have some of Dylan's most realized in-the-studio arrangements, thanks to the notable crew of musicians backing him. Not much detail has emerged about these sessions, and some sources indicate more musicians played than are actually listed on the album cover. The playing on the album made you want to find out more about the other musicians, and opened my eyes to Norman Blake, who plays acoustic guitar and according to *Rolling Stone* magazine at the time

also dobro. Listening to this album just now, I realized that has to be Norman Blake playing the acoustic lead on “Nashville Skyline Rag,” and if he also contributed the dobro, then a good deal of the picking on that song is him. He’s an incredible guitarist and great songwriter in his own right.

While *Nashville Skyline* ultimately turned out to be a brief escapade, especially vocally, it showed that Dylan was quite capable of writing a straight love song without grand poetic allusions, and when he would eventually revisit this style of writing, it was neither shocking or surprising. But it sure had people wondering had the time.

40 Years of Self Portrait

On June 8th, 1970, Bob Dylan released his tenth album (not counting Greatest Hits), and his second 2-Lp set, *Self Portrait*. It was the first Dylan album to be unabashedly and resoundingly panned by virtually every music critic in the country, most notably by Greil Marcus, who led what amounted to an assassination squad of writers in *Rolling Stone* magazine, in a review that famously started with the line: “What is this shit?”

It is safe to say that a hefty portion of Dylan’s fans at the time were also bewildered. Some dismissed him forever, and others took a long time to come back, and the albums Dylan released in the following few years did little to change that assessment. However, what the various Dylan discussion forums on the Internet have revealed over the years is that people who came to Dylan later on, who were either too young or not even born at the time, who didn’t have the expectation that every album was going to be a new masterpiece, and more importantly, deliver the word or the state of the union – these fans view the album totally differently, usually not in a negative context or anything remotely close to it. In fact, many of them at the very least like it, and can’t understand why it was ever the subject of controversy.

By 1970, record albums, had become far more than just collections of songs on a disc, at least by those working in the general area of what had become to be called rock music, an unfortunate term that included a broad variety of genres. Dylan wasn’t then, isn’t now, and never was a “rock musician.” At the time of *Self Portrait*, Richard Nixon was president, the Vietnam war seemed like it would never end, the country was divided and in turmoil (sound familiar?) and whatever causes Dylan once might have been linked with, usually against his will, were also fractured and basically blowing in the wind.

And so the missing prophet in action, the guy everyone including other musicians, is looking to for answers releases this double-record set, with a seemingly important title, and the majority of the songs were covers. On the new songs, one was a song that had been a hit for Manfred Mann, which everyone already knew, one was instrumental, one was Dylan more or less humming, one was exactly two lines that he didn’t sing or play on, so in the end it was down to two new songs. In addition, two of the covers are done twice in different versions.

The remaining songs are split between country songs, old folk and blues songs, a couple of songs by other contemporary singer-songwriters, a pop tune and a couple of live tracks, the first live tracks (other than those on Newport Folk Festival recordings) and the flipside of a lone single to be released by Dylan.

Self Portrait was recorded in the spring of 1969 in Nashville, in the late winter and spring of 1970 in New York City, and the live stuff was done at the Isle of Wight concert in 1969, at the time Dylan's only post motorcycle accident full concert appearance. Then, as was found out later, many of the New York tracks were sent back to Nashville, where producer Bob Johnston overdubbed strings, vocals and other instruments. All of this was thrown together in some sort of order that sort of maybe kind of makes sense or maybe it doesn't.

What is clear is the following the recording of Nashville Skyline, Dylan was obviously at the very least toying with the idea of putting an album of straight country and western cover songs, working for the most part with the same crew of musicians who had been on Nashville Skyline, plus some other Nashville studio stalwarts. For the sticklers out there, it should be noted this would also be the same rhythm section he'd been using on record since Blonde on Blonde of Charley McCoy on bass and Kenny Buttrey on drums. The songs were classic country and honky tonk songs of the '50s and '60s recorded by such artists as the Everly Brothers, George Jones, Hank Snow, Johnny Cash and several others.

The sessions in New York, recorded much closer to the release of Self Portrait, by the same token could also be viewed as Dylan toying with the idea of making for lack of a better term, a folk album. As noted above, the songs were a combination of old ballads, blues, bluegrass tunes, and songs by other contemporary songwriters such as Gordon Lightfoot, Paul Simon, Eric Andersen and Buffy Sainte-Marie. For these sessions Dylan dropped the vocal style he'd been using on Nashville Skyline, and the successive sessions in Nashville, and returned to something approximating his pre-Nashville Skyline voice. It should be noticed that at one of the sessions, George Harrison showed up (though he does not appear on Self Portrait) and several older Dylan songs were recorded as well as some old rock and roll songs. Also some of these sessions would be the beginnings of Dylan's next album, New Morning.

Where the Nashville sessions were slick and tight, the New York sessions were loose by compassion, at times even sloppy. For these sessions, Dylan recruited guitarist, David Bromberg, the first of three musicians who attended Columbia University at roughly the same time in the late '60s who would work with Dylan in the '70s. Bromberg was building a reputation as the hot acoustic guitar player in New York City at the time, mainly due to his work with Jerry Jeff Walker. A few years before Walker and Bromberg played live on Bob Fass' all night show, "Radio Unnameable" on WBAI and recorded "Mr. Bojangles," which quickly became one of the most requested songs on WBAI. When walked finally recorded the song, on the album of the same name, his first for Atco Records, the version recorded which included Bromberg was so produced and slick, that on his next album he included the version recorded on Fass' show.

Over the years, there's been many theories on Self Portrait, and all of them make sense. Dylan, depending on what mood he's in and what position the clouds and stars are in the sky has both defended the album and knocked it. During the couple of years prior to the album, bootlegs had emerged in a big way, and Dylan was and is a major target of bootleggers. In some ways, Self Portrait resembled the first and one of the most famous Dylan bootlegs, Great White Wonder, which has songs from various places, mixing the

Basement Tapes, with tracks recorded very early in his career, outtakes from Bringing It All Back Home, and even a song which Dylan performed on Johnny Cash's TV show, that would appear on Self Portrait in a studio version, Living The Blues.

Another theory is that Dylan, who had split from manager Albert Grossman (though not many people knew at the time) simply did not want to give Grossman, who had a hefty percentage of publishing royalties any more good songs.

The third theory is Dylan simply had writer's block. The opening song of the album, "All the tired horses," sung by a trio of women backed by one acoustic guitar and a string section, is a couplet sung over and over again, "All the tired horses in the sun/How'm I supposed to get any riding done?" This is followed by "Hmm" signifying humming. So of course Dylan fans, being well, Dylan fans immediately assumed riding meant writing. The point is that when artists aren't inspired, they will often go back to what inspired them in the first place. And so this album could easily be viewed as an album of the music Dylan heard that inspired him to begin with. And this was something he would do quite a few times in his career, perhaps more effectively later on. And even Greil Marcus had to admit "All The Tired Horses" was a gorgeous piece of music.

Ultimately all of these theories make sense, combined with the joker side of Dylan's personality. There are many Dylan fans who have argued on discussion forums that if Self Portrait had appeared as a bootleg, the very people who put it down would shouting it's praises to the mountains. Maybe. At the time I felt about it a couple of ways. I never thought it was quite as bad as the critics did, but I didn't think it was all that wonderful either. It was Dylan you could eat corn flakes to. It was Dylan you didn't have to think about. The problem with the last sentence, is that it being Dylan you ended up thinking about it anyway, and ended up wondering if this is what it's gonna be like forever.

What made the album stand out at the time was the absolute lack of drive and emotion on a good deal of the songs. And it wasn't just that they were covers. Dylan had done some incredible cover songs before and after the album, where he sang with startling intensity, such as "Moonshiner." But much of the album had a feel like, well shucks, I'm just gonna have a nice old time sittin' back and running through some of my favorite songs. Ultimately what made the album disappointing was Dylan's covers quite often were nowhere near as good as the original versions of the songs, or even other versions of the songs. If you heard Doc Watson sing "Little Sadie," there was no reason to hear Dylan sing it, and if you heard George Jones do "Take Me As I Am Or Let Me Go," it's the same story.

So how do I feel about the album four decades later? Well, I listen to it all the time in the car, but not in the order of the album, left off some stuff, like "The Boxer," where Dylan's idea of harmony is singing in two different voices, added some stuff from the same sessions from the "Dylan" album, and left off the Isle of Wight stuff completely, so I wouldn't have to hear Dylan sing, "Mystery tramp with the apple in his eye."

Is there good stuff on the album? Definitely. A lot of thought went into slowing down "Copper Kettle" to make it into the true showpiece of the record, and Dylan sings it with conviction. If Dylan had sung everything with the energy of depth of feeling he shows on "Alberta #2," the album would've been an entire different story. And if Dylan had sung the entire album, the way he sings the last verse of "In Search of Little Sadie," there would have been no bad reviews whatsoever. Sometimes, I think if he'd done just one more take of "Days Of 49," he would've totally nailed it. In the end, it's just a collection of songs that you can put on and go sit on the porch and look at the stars, and every one in a while a guitar solo, or a dobro lick, or a harp solo will kind of grab you. And I don't think it as meant to be much more than that.

The Redefinition of Bob Dylan's Self Portrait

In June of 1970, Bob Dylan released his tenth album, a two-record set with the weighty title of *Self Portrait*. It had a self portrait on the cover done in a style similar to the painting he did for *The Band's Music From Big Pink* the year before. For most of the previous four years, with a couple of exceptions, Dylan kept out of sight, hoping to lose the voice of a generation title that had been bestowed upon him, and all that went with it. Six years before, Dylan had sworn off any direct political involvement and had phased the songs that originally made him famous out of his concerts. In 1969, the Woodstock Music and Arts Festival brought unwanted attention to the town (really a village) he lived in, even though it was actually held miles away in another county. Dylan refused to appear and rubbed it in by appearing a couple of weeks later at a music festival in England on the Isle of Wight. But his fans as well as the music press, especially the then-growing alternative music press, still expected him to deliver the word. *Self Portrait* was clearly not the "word" by anyone's definition.

Instead of new original masterpieces, *Self Portrait* was primarily a collection of covers: folk songs, country-western tunes from the '50s and '60s, songs by other contemporary writers, a couple of Everly Brothers classics, a pop tune and six new originals. Of the originals, one was a two-line couplet sung by backup singers, one was a hum, one was a basically pointless instrumental, which left three songs with words and lyrics.

The critical response was negative to say the least. *Rolling Stone* set up a firing squad led by Greil Marcus, though later publisher Jann Wenner wrote his own review in defense of the album. The response among fans was slightly gentler, with some liking it immediately, some hating it totally, and others wondering what the hell he was doing. However the ensuing years revealed a couple of things: finding two fans who were in agreement about what songs they did like was difficult, and the second as I pointed out in an article I wrote a few years ago was that Dylan fans who were either too young or born after the album's release did not view it at all the same way that Dylan's fans in 1970 did, because they were free of the weight of expectations. In fact many couldn't understand why there was any controversy about it at all.

Okay, so what did I think at the time, being almost 19 and a committed fan for seven years? I thought it was Dylan you didn't have to think about, that you could put on and have it in the background while you were doing something else. However, the conundrum was that since it was Bob Dylan, you thought about it anyway.

The problems with the original album were partially due to the sequencing which at times seemed either random or jarring with some performances sounding halfhearted. In retrospect, it was two different albums trying to be one. In 1969 following the recording of *Nashville Skyline*, Dylan returned to Nashville recording several country-western covers. They would be his final recordings in Nashville. A year later he started recording in New York with guitarist David Bromberg and keyboard player Al Kooper, recording a number of folk songs and songs by other contemporary singer-songwriters, who like Dylan were influenced by folk music. At the same time, and at some of the same sessions, he was also recording an album of new originals, *New Morning*. Several

of the covers were then delivered to Nashville, where bass, drums, and other instruments, as well as string sections and background singers were added. No one knew this at the time, and whether it was Dylan's idea or producer Bob Johnston's idea, or their idea together remains unknown and probably will remain that way.

It should also be pointed out that during the last two years prior to the release of *Self Portrait*, bootleg records of Dylan had started to emerge in a big way. The earliest bootlegs, most notably the double-disc *Great White Wonder*, mixed various recordings from Dylan's career, in one big unidentified jumbled mess. (Later on, Bootlegs would become far more sophisticated). Many people have speculated over the years that with *Self Portrait*, Dylan was creating his own bootleg and duplicating that one big mess, while others have pointed out and probably rightly so, that if *Self Portrait* had been a bootleg, Dylan's fans would've gone nuts over it.

And so 43 years later arrives *Another Self Portrait*, complete with a new self portrait on the cover, that happens to be whether by design or coincidence the tenth volume of The Bootleg Series.

Another Self Portrait ignores the Nashville country covers, and focuses primarily on the New York sessions with Dylan joined by guitarist David Bromberg and occasionally Al Kooper on piano. Included are a couple of outtakes from *Nashville Skyline* and a couple of other sessions that happened roughly around the same time, and a couple of new songs from the Isle of Wight concert. As with some of the other sets in the Bootleg Series, this is available in two versions: a two-disc version that is the *Another Self Portrait* album, and a four disc box set that also includes a remastered and remixed version of the complete Isle of Wight concert with The Band, a remastered version of the original *Self Portrait*, and a hard bound quite beautiful photo book, *Time Passes Slowly*.

Produced by Jeff Rosen and Steve Berkowitz, and compiled by Rosen, the sound of the album is warm, inviting and intimate. Stripped of the excess instrumentation, the feel of the majority of the album is of a couple of guys sitting in a room trading songs and having a good time while doing it. Dylan isn't trying for anything special or trying to create the next masterpiece. It's quite clear what he's interested in doing is playing guitar or piano and most of all singing. The result is some of his most relaxed sounding vocals ever. And by relaxed, I don't mean that he sounds sleepy or isn't putting out. From a purely vocal standpoint, this album contains some of the best singing he's ever done. One of the revealing things is that on the tracks that were on the original album, where it sounded at times like he didn't really care about the song, by stripping out the excess, it's quite clear he does.

The album is not sequenced chronologically, but by feel and related themes and ultimately tied together by the music itself. Some of the tracks have circulated among collectors, but the majority haven't. And while the album succeeds in redefining what Dylan was doing musically, particularly in 1970, it is also very much the Bootleg Series, and there are several nods to the very first Bootleg Series released 22 years ago. One of the fascinating things about Dylan's recording history is there always seem to be alternate versions to the alternate versions, surprises where you least expect them, and certain songs, both covers and originals that he keeps going back to and trying in different ways.

Starting out with a bare bones demo of "Went To See The Gypsy, the album weaves its way between the folk songs and the originals that would make up *New Morning* and various other tracks in a way that subtly builds up impact. The truly important thing about the Bootleg Series is it gives an almost behind the scenes glimpse of Dylan's creative and songwriting process, how he will start out with a basic idea and try it innumerable ways until he finds what he's looking for. On this album are two very different versions of "Went To See The Gypsy" and "Time Passes Slowly" and none of them are like the ones on *New Morning*. However, finding what he's looking for doesn't necessarily stop with the record. Those who attend his concerts know his songs are continual works in progress.

It is not uncommon for musicians (or any artist for that matter) when they feel the inspiration running dry to return to the source of what inspired them in the first place. In the mini-documentary Columbia put on the net to promote the album, Al Kooper says Dylan showed up with a bunch of *Sing Out!* magazines and started going through the songs. (*Sing Out!* was pretty much the bible of the folk music during the '60s, and in addition to articles and reviews, published a number of songs in each issue, and also issued several songbooks, Reprints From *Sing Out!* More than likely, it was the "reprints" that Dylan showed up with, and as proof, just yesterday a friend posted a photo on his Facebook wall of two of the songs on this album right next to each other from a *Sing Out!* reprint.) Songbooks or not, what the album makes clear is that Dylan loves and treasures these songs. Many of the songs here such as "This Evening So Soon" and "Railroad Bill" have the spirit of his first album, though his singing and playing are far more polished and less raucous. When he starts playing the harp, he takes you right back to the beginning of his career.

Of the traditional songs and covers, there are numerous high points. At the top is the traditional ballad, "Pretty Saro." When Dylan wants to he has a way of taking these old ballads and singing them across all the years they've been around. Singing in the voice he used on *Nashville Skyline*, Dylan takes the songs to ethereal heights in a way that borders on spooky. He is at the height of his vocal powers – check out the way he glides up to a falsetto on the line "I'd write my love a letter." Just as Bromberg starts to equal that etherealness with a guitar solo, the song ends making you wish for more.

Last spring Dylan's cover of Eric Andersen's "Thirsty Boots" was released as one side of a single for Record Store Day. For years I wondered how he'd treat the song which Andersen wrote the song in the spring of 1965 for friends who were Civil Rights workers returning from risking their lives in Mississippi and Alabama. I saw Andersen sing the song not long after he wrote it at a *Broadside Hoot* in New York City, where I knew it was an instant classic. Upon finally hearing Dylan sing it last spring, my first reaction was if this had been on the original *Self Portrait*, those nasty reviews would have been quite a bit different. Backed by Bromberg on guitar, and Kooper on piano, and playing guitar and harp, Dylan treats the song with total respect and appreciation, totally nailing it on the line "All of this and more my friend, your song shall not be failed.

"Spanish Is The Loving Tongue" a song Dylan has recorded many times. This version is similar to the version on the flipside of the single of "Watching The River Flow." But where that version was more exploratory both in the vocal and Dylan's piano excursions, this one sticks more firmly to the melody of the song and is equally beautiful.

The cover of Tom Paxton's "Annie's Going To Sing Her Song" is simply is one of the most straightforward covers he's done.

"These Hands" is a country-western classic written by Eddie Noack and originally recorded by Hank Snow in 1956, but covered by many other greats including Johnny Cash and George Jones. Kris Kristofferson has often told a story about a songwriter's gathering at Cash's house where Dylan performed this song in 1969 and blew everyone away. The version here, unadorned, will go down as one of Dylan's great vocals.

Dylan totally reworks "Bring Me A Little Water," a song usually associated with Leadbelly. While the first line of the chorus and the melody is the same, the verses are not the ones Leadbelly sang or the ones the Weavers sang in their pop-oriented recording for Decca. Playing piano and backed by a small band and a trio of background singers, it is one of the unexpected surprises of the album. "Alberta #3" has a similar feel with the same backup singers, Dylan on guitar and Bromberg on dobro. Tempo wise it is between the two versions of this song on the original album and may be the best of the three. Everyone seems in sync and it flows.

Another surprise is "Tattle O'Day," also known as "Little Brown Dog," and recorded by Dave Van Ronk as "I Bought Me A Little Dog," is a traditional children's song, but also encompasses what Dylan was talking about where he said there's mystery and truth in folk music. Dylan's vocal again is quite straightforward and Kooper and Bromberg provide subtle accompaniment in the background.

Of the songs from the original album included here minus the excess instrumentation, the two songs that stood out on that album are the ones that stand out here, "Days Of 49" and "Copper Kettle."

When *New Morning* appeared a few months after *Self Portrait*, it was hailed by critics relieved that it wasn't *Self Portrait* as a return to form. The songs reflected Dylan's life as a family man, but had an edgier feel reflecting a bit more tension than the songs on *Nashville Skyline*. I always viewed it as Dylan's piano album since he played piano on seven of its 12 songs. The outtakes included here show the album could have gone in a number of directions. "If Not For You" is present in a slowed down version with Dylan on piano accompanied by an unidentified bass player and unknown violinist. "Went to the Gypsy," in addition to the version that starts the album is also slowed down in a version with Dylan on electric piano, with a not mentioned bass player.

"If Dogs Run Free," which appeared on the album as kind of a beat poem in a jazz arrangement complete with a scat vocal behind Dylan, is presented as a talking song with a soulful groove and a gospel chorus.

As kind of a reverse mirror of what was done with the *Self Portrait* tracks, two songs from the album are presented with overdubs. "Sign On The Window," which has circulated for several years among collectors has a well done string section emphasizing the piano breaks between verses, and "New Morning" has a horn section. Both the string and horn arrangements were done by Al Kooper and Charles Calello. The horn section reflects the kind of innovative horn arrangements Kooper did on the first *Blood Sweat and Tears* album and is at least quite interesting. Dylan chose not to use either, though he did keep a brief French horn interlude on "New Morning." Most surprising is a full band almost hard rock version of "Time Passes Slowly," that is unlike

anything on New Morning or any leaked outtake. The album ends with a solo version of "When I Paint My Masterpiece" with Dylan on piano. Some of the lyrics are closer to the version The Band recorded, but the fun part is when he gets to the bridge and apparently improvises "Sure wish I hadn't of sold my old victrola/Ain't nothin' that good old rock and rolla."

On August 31, 1969, played his first full concert in three years backed by The Band at the Isle of Wight Festival. The concert generated the usual controversies that seem to perpetually surround Dylan from his fee to his white suit, to the fact that he played only an hour. Four songs appeared on the original Self Portrait, but were mixed with Dylan's voice way out front. Now for the first time the entire concert is presented remixed and remastered. As to the controversy about the length of the concert, Dylan did 17 songs which as more or less what he played at all his previous concerts. There were seven live debuts including three songs from John Wesley Harding and two from The Basement Tapes. Unlike his tour with the group three years before, Dylan played acoustic guitar throughout, and four of the songs featured Dylan playing solo. The Band had only recently started performing live as The Band a few months before, and were at the top of their game. Vocally Dylan was still in full Nashville Skyline mode.

There are several cool moments. "I Threw It All Away," is presented more as a soul song with a cool stop after the first verse. "Maggie's Farm" is hard blues with the Band joining in on the chorus and echoing "no more" on the verses.

After "Maggie's Farm, The Band departed the stage for Dylan's solo set. His first song was a total surprise, the Irish song "Wild Mountain Thyme." Okay, I have to back up here to explain the full impact of this particular performance. In late 1970 or '71, I visited a friend in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In the record collection I spied a bootleg of the Isle of Wight. The sound quality was horrendous especially on the songs with the band, a mass of distortion. Then there was "Wild Mountain Thyme." It was like nothing Dylan had ever done before. Instead of using the traditional rhythm of the song on guitar, he was using well, his Dylan style rhythm. But it was the singing. It was as if he was singing on Venus, his voice cascading in ways it had never done before embracing the poetry of lyrics. Listen to the way he sings "And on it I will put all the flowers of the mountain." I probably played it ten times in a row driving anyone else in that house nuts. I went home and quickly found an equally bad sounding boot, and over the years bought and acquired several more versions in search of a good sounding copy, a search that is now over.

A close to equally compelling "It Ain't Me, Babe" follows. In addition to an usual chording structure, this version seems one more of regret and sorry than anger or sadness. Dylan has done this song hundreds of times over the years in various arrangements and one of the incredible things about him as a performer is the range of emotions expressed with this song. A truly lovely though shortened version of "To Ramona" follows, and this song in particular fits his singing style. "Mr. Tambourine Man" is the only disappointment of the acoustic set. The song starts out fine, but after the first verse, he attempts a harp solo (the only harp playing of the night), quickly abandons it, rushes through the second verse and ends the song.

However things are resurrected when the Band joins him for a slow sad, "I Dreamed I Saw Saint Augustine," that features a neat step-up key change for the third verse, where he repeats the final line with The Band joining in.

The first live rendering of “Lay Lady Lay” follows and it being The Band, the feel is a lot closer to Memphis than it is to Nashville. Another live debut, “Highway 61 Revisited” comes next. Not at all like the original album version, this one chugs along the smoking freight train with Levon’s drums standing out, and he also joins in at the end of each verse snarling “Highway 61.” A recast “One Too Many Mornings” comes next in a stop start arrangement, that unlike the slow surging dirge of 1966 that had the feel of being up all night is now like a frisky morning walk on a sunny day.

The next highpoint of the show is the debut of “I Pity The Poor Immigrant” with Garth Hudson on accordion. The band takes it slow and carefully and so does Dylan until he gets to the second part of the second verse when he suddenly totally leans into the song, shouting at the end of the verse “take it again,” followed by kind of mandolin style guitar solo Robbie Robertson excels at. Dylan is equally intense on the last verse.

What remains one of the strangest versions of “Like A Rolling Stone” comes next. The Band is fine, but it doesn’t really work and it seems Dylan is singing it because he has to sing it as a crowd pleaser. He seems way more engaged with the newer songs. Once the major hit is out of the way, it’s time to have fun which they do on “Mighty Quinn,” “Minstrel Boy” ending with “Rainy Women” with the Band joining in on the last line. Best new line is “They’ll stone you when you’re riding on your bike/They’ll you when you’re singing in the mic.”

Finally there is the remaster of the original Self Portrait album. The compression used in the remastering process has made the bass a bit too prominent in the mix especially on the overdubs of the New York recordings, though the other instruments are crisp and more defined. The funny thing is it doesn’t seem all that over produced after all.

Another Self Portrait makes it very clear that there was much more going on in this much maligned period of Dylan’s career than anyone thought. Is it about deep mystical insights and startling poetry? Not at all. But it about a lot of good music and most of all singing.

Reflections on Tour 74

It was some Sunday morning either in late October or early November 1973, and I’d just woken and up and walked into the kitchen, when my house mate, another Dylan fan and another Band fan said to me excitedly, “They just announced on the Radio, Dylan and The Band are going to tour.” In my pre-coffee state, I probably replied, “Yeah, right,” but he insisted it was the real thing, and soon they announced it on the radio again.

Today, Dylan fans who were born later and start getting anxious if a tour ends and another one isn’t announced within a couple of weeks don’t understand what it was like back then. Dylan was the man in hiding, and for him to tour with The Band again was a dream, a fantasy unlikely to happen. Along with the news of the tour was a forthcoming new album on a new label, Asylum Records. Then it was going to be on Dylan’s own label Ashes And Sand, (the name of his touring company in the ‘60s) and then it was going to be on Asylum, and then the album was going to be called *Ceremonies of the Horsemen* and then it wasn’t. And very soon after the announcement of a new label, just to add to the confusion, Columbia Records rushed out an album called *Dylan* that turned

out to be outtakes from what was generally considered at the time his worst album, *Self Portrait* and the songs were all covers, and some tracks were barely mixed. Finally the ad for the tour appeared in the paper. A very plain ad and you had to send a check or a money order to Box Lunch at a post office box. Well, before the ad appeared, the news was out there that the tour was by mail only, and at the time my job at a major record store didn't pay enough to open up a checking account, but a guy I knew slipped me the info a couple of days before the ad appeared, so I could get a money order the day before the mailing date since there were all these little restrictions on getting the tickets. There were three shows in Philly, but I could only afford two, I chose the two evening ones, there was an afternoon show on the first day. The ticket price was eight bucks (for the Philly shows) which at the time was deemed outrageous. I remember driving down to the main post office about 10 miles from my house, timing the trip so I could put the letter in the post office mailbox exactly at midnight or soon after. I was not the only car in line.

I decided to go to the first show with my dad, who had never seen him and who could discuss Dylan as well as anyone, in addition to pointing out innumerable poetic references.

The atmosphere at the Spectrum was beyond excited. With no introduction Dylan and The Band took the stage and went right into "Rainy Day Women." Dylan had a scarf around his neck and was shouting out the words, the Band was on fire. But it was quite a bit different than when I'd seen Dylan last eight years and three months before. Then it was in a 2,000 seat theater if that. This was a hockey arena with about 20,000 people in attendance. A somewhat rocked up "Lay Lady Lay" that was almost chanted came next, followed by "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues," where finally it seemed as if Bob Dylan might really be the guy on the stage. A kind of crazy speeded up "It Ain't Me Babe" was followed by "I Don't Believe You" and then Dylan went to the piano for "Ballad Of A Thin Man." It was all fine, but that certain thing Dylan does, that thing that gets you deep inside and doesn't let go wasn't there. Dylan left the stage, and The Band, who I'd seen several times since they started touring in 1969 did a short set starting appropriately enough with "Stage Fright." Dylan returned for three songs, leading off with a rocked up "All Along The Watchtower," that I never felt was paying tribute to Jimi Hendrix, that it was just Dylan and The Band playing "All Along The Watchtower" with short solos from Robbie and Garth, followed by "Leopard- Skin Pill-Box Hat" and his huge surprise hit at the time, "Knockin' On Heaven's Door" with The Band joining him in singing the chorus. With that the show, was starting to get more like it.

Following an intermission, Dylan appeared alone onstage with a white jacket and an acoustic guitar. Still close to shouting but not as loud as with The Band, he went into speedy versions of "The Times, They Are A-Changin'," "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," and then finally slowing down for my very first "Song To Woody" and "Mr. Tambourine Man."

Then came a new song I thought (for years) was called "Except You." From the opening line, "There's nothin' 'round here that I believe in," I leaned forward. This was what I'd waited years for. For the first time all night, he wasn't just performing but truly singing and getting deep into it. It was followed by "It's Alright Ma," again raced through, but powerful with the audience in the midst of the Watergate scandal going completely crazy at the "Even the President of the United States sometimes must have to stand naked" line.

Dylan left the stage, The Band returned for a four song set, Dylan reappeared and began another new song, "Forever Young." (Planet Waves had not been released yet.) Hearing it for the first time was spooky, with Dylan stretching out the "young" on each chorus, digging deep down. Then came another new song, "Something There Is About You" that took the show to a higher level, which led into a triumphant "Like A Rolling Stone," during which the entire audience went crazy. After a short break, they returned for another surprise, "Most Likely You Go Your Way," and were gone.

The next night I went back by myself after work. The opening set was the same, but The Band changed their set to include a song they only did in concert, "Loving You Is Sweeter Than Ever." Then after "All Along The Watchtower," Dylan added "The Ballad Of Hollis Brown in a heavy arrangement.

The acoustic set was one song shorter, but opened with "Just Like A Woman" and "Girl From The North Country. Then came a new song, which I'd found out a few days later when *Planet Waves* was finally released called "Wedding Song." It was a long song and in a sense the most poetic song of the night, and when he hit the final line, "I love you more than ever now that the past is gone," it was sung with such fierce intensity the place erupted. That he followed it with "Nobody Except You" was icing on the cake.

When "Nobody Except You," wasn't on *Planet Waves*, I was really annoyed and even more annoyed when it wasn't on the live album, "Before The Flood." By then I'd already begun the great bootleg search for the ultimate copy which continued for decades, and a number of terrible sounding bootlegs.

These days, when I hear boots of the 74 tour, especially if the sound quality is good, I'll come across some fairly amazing things, but often it has more to do with the playing of The Band than Dylan's singing, though every once in awhile a great vocal will pop up.

I left those shows thinking, well, it was good to see him play again. However that would change dramatically a little less than two years later in Hartford, Connecticut.

More Blood, More Tracks

When Bob Dylan released *Blood On The Tracks* early in 1975, it was more than a return to form. It was a return to the intimacy and at the same time the intensity of his greatest work, but on a whole new level. This new level included not only the lyrics – one could argue his most personal lyrics since *Another Side Of Bob Dylan* – but the performance as well. The singing and his guitar and harp showed him to be at the very top of his game.

Gone were the songs of domestic bliss that had marked every album of original material (with the obvious exception of the soundtrack, *Pat Garrett & Billy The Kid*) since *Nashville Skyline*. But to be fair, several songs on *Planet Waves* showed at the very least that Dylan was starting to again stretch out his writing. In retrospect it was the bridge he had to cross to get to *Blood On The Tracks*.

The initial sessions were recorded in New York in four days at A&R Studios (formerly Columbia Studio A where Dylan recorded his first albums) in September 1974, and vocally it is almost hard to believe this is the same guy who began that year by shouting his way across the country in his first tour in eight years. It should also be noted that the album was Dylan's return to Columbia Records after briefly signing to Asylum Records and Dylan was clearly determined to make it a good one. It should also be clear that Dylan wanted the album to be primarily acoustic.

According to Larry Sloman's article on the sessions that appeared in Rolling Stone not long after the album was recorded, Dylan ran into musician Eric Weissberg on the street and mentioned he was recording, but since it was the Jewish holiday Rosh Hashanah, he was having a hard time finding musicians. Weissberg told him he had a band.

Also in that article was George Harrison quoting verses from "Tangled Up In Blue," and hardcore Dylan fans who'd read the article couldn't help but notice when the album finally came out that the lyrics Harrison quoted were "And he was standin' on the side of the road/Rain fallin' on his shoes" while the version on the album went "And I was standin' on the side of the road/Rain fallin' on my shoes." Also Pete Hamill's liner notes which quoted from "If You See Her, Say Hello" again had lyrics which weren't what Dylan was singing on the record: "If you're makin' love to her, kiss for the kid/Who always has respected her/For doin' what she did" - when what Dylan sang on the record was "If you get close to her, kiss her once for me/Always have respected her/For doin' what she did and getting' free."

In the Dylan world, which is like no other world, where his fans note every lyrical change major or minor, this set the question in motion of where is this other version and were there other changes on other songs as well. Eventually it was revealed that Dylan had recut half the album in two sessions in Minneapolis using Minnesota musicians at the end of December 1974 at the suggestion of his brother, who felt the New York sessions were too subdued and also that every song was in the same key, with Dylan playing the songs with his guitar in Open E tuning. It wasn't long before bootlegs of the original New York sessions started appearing, sometimes on boots with other songs and sometimes on their own as "The New York Sessions" or "Blood On The Tapes." Dylan fans have long argued about which versions are better. The answer to that is they're both great for different reasons. That said, as an album I prefer the New York Sessions version, because there's a cohesion of sound and feel that isn't on the album as released. It simply has that special indefinable thing and an added intensity that as great as it is isn't on the album as released. In addition, the less is more approach (something I always prefer no matter who the artist is) Dylan took in both the vocals and the instrumentation serves him well. One time, sometime in the past 20 years I put on the "New York Sessions" and I couldn't stop listening to it for a month! I am not alone in feeling that Dylan never should have messed with it. Joining me in this are several friends and Larry "Ratso" Sloman, author of what I consider to be the best book on Bob Dylan because it is the only one that gives you a feeling of who Bob Dylan really is, *On The Road With Bob Dylan*.

The first officially released outtakes appeared on Biograph in 1985, with the originally scheduled "You're A Big Girl Now," and an incredible song that Roger McGuinn had covered, "Up To Me" that wasn't on the album. The Bootleg Series Vol 1-3 released in 1991 had four more songs, none of which were on the original test pressing, "Tangled Up In Blue," "If You See Her Say Hello," "Idiot Wind" and "Call Letter Blues" which was essentially "Meet Me In The Morning" with totally different lyrics. In 2012 on the flipside of the single of "Duquesne Whistle" released for Record Store Day, an acoustic take of

"Meet Me In The Morning" appeared leaving Dylan fans wondering whether the long-rumored bootleg series of Blood On The Tracks was finally going to be released. Last summer it was announced that the 14th volume of The Bootleg Series, More Blood, More Tracks would be released. This was actually something I'd known since February, but had to keep quiet about it. Immediately Dylan fans who love to complain started arguing about the title, the cover design and what the album could possibly contain. The funny thing about this was none of them had heard it. The album as usual with The Bootleg Series is available in a couple of formats, and one-CD version also available as two LPs, and the Deluxe Edition which includes six 6 CDs, and in addition a hardbound book with the liner notes, plus a replication of Dylan's somewhat legendary red notebook, which has his handwritten lyrics and changes. The Deluxe Edition is also a limited edition and once the initial pressing has sold, it will not be in production again. It is the Deluxe Edition that this review talks about.

The majority of the set is devoted to the New York sessions. As it turns out, the five Minneapolis tracks that appeared on the original album are all that could be found of those sessions. On a technical note, the Minneapolis songs have been totally remixed and the result is revealing. For instance, I never noticed a piano on "Idiot Wind" before, but there is most definitely one now. Also, Dylan had asked engineer Phil Ramone to speed up the original New York tracks. This is a not uncommon thing in recording studios. I've done it myself. The tracks have now been restored to their original speed and whatever effects Ramone may have added have been removed as well.

The only surprise song is an incomplete version of "Spanish Is The Loving Tongue," a song Dylan first did (as far as we know) on The Basement Tapes, and again for the sessions for Self Portrait/New Morning. The song is with Paul Griffin on piano and Tony Brown on bass, and one wonders what would've happened if Dylan had tried it again. There are other surprises however, such as the first disc being Dylan solo, (apparently before other musicians showed up) playing guitar and harp. I am among those who firmly believe that when Dylan plays solo, it is almost impossible for him to do wrong. Two tracks from disc one have been heard before, "If You See Her Say Hello (Take 2)" which appeared on the very first Bootleg Series and "Lily Rosemary and the Jack Of Hearts" which was on the New York test pressing. There is another take of the song that's aborted about midway through. The other songs on disc one include "You're A Big Girl Now" in three takes, "Simple Twist Of Fate" and "Up To Me." One of the things that makes The Bootleg Series important is you can really hear how Dylan works, and in this case how much he puts into it, doing take after take. On this set, while there are occasional subtle lyric changes, it's more about how he'll change the emphasis on words and lines and trying different tempos.

Disc Two features the unsuccessful sessions with Eric Weissberg and Deliverance and the other session musicians, guitarist Barry Kornfeld, keyboard player Thomas McFaul and pedal steel guitarist Buddy Cage.

Before I continue, I have to correct a misconception in the liner notes. Eric Weissberg and Deliverance were an existing band and had been together for more than a year before the Blood On The Tracks sessions. They had an album on Warner Brothers Records, Rural Free Delivery. They were a country rock band with a big emphasis on bluegrass. They were not dubbed Deliverance for the session and the three musicians named above, Kornfeld, McFaul and Cage were not part of Deliverance. Weissberg put the band together when "Dueling Banjos" became a surprise #2 on the Billboard singles chart hit. Deliverance did not play on "Dueling Banjos," which was recorded by Weissberg and

guitarist Steve Mandell (a former member of the band.) Eric Weissberg had been part of the New York folk music scene since the 1950s. He was among the first New Yorkers to delve into bluegrass music, and was a multi-instrumentalist as well as a Julliard Music School graduate who played guitar, banjo, violin, mandolin and bass and was in-demand session musician who appeared on records by innumerable folk musicians, including Judy Collins and Ramblin' Jack Elliott. The other members of Deliverance were guitarist Charlie Brown, drummer Richard Crooks and bassist Tony Brown (not related to Charlie Brown). Thomas McFaul is a session musician. Barry Kornfeld is a guitarist who like Weissberg had long been involved with the New York folk scene. He was a member of Dave Van Ronk's jug band, The Ragtime Jug Stompers and worked with Tom Paxton for several years. Buddy Cage is a Canadian pedal steel guitarist who started out with Ian & Sylvia's country-rock band Great Speckled Bird and went on to become a longtime member of New Riders of the Purple Sage as well as doing sessions for several other artists.

For whatever reason and it becomes obvious as Disc Two goes on, Deliverance simply did not mesh with what Dylan was trying to accomplish, though "Meet Me In The Morning" did end up on "Blood On The Tracks," presented here with an additional verse, and the very similar "Call Letter Blues" was released on Bootleg Series Vol. 1-3. I used to think they were the same track with Dylan singing different words, but the new remixed versions have me rethinking that. Dylan's rhythm acoustic is much more prominent in these mixes and there are differences and also Buddy Cage's pedal steel and lead guitar are slightly changed. On take one of "Call Letter Blues," Dylan plays a harp solo that's reminiscent of his first album, but then lets the end of the song collapse.

Apparently drummer Richard Crooks (who passed away a few years ago) isolated in a sound booth was having trouble hearing and would fall behind on the beat, while some of the other musicians were having trouble following Dylan's changes and were unable to see what chords he was playing because he was in an open tuning. The sad thing about this is Crooks was an excellent drummer. I saw him in 2001 and 2002 backing the great soul singer Howard Tate and he propelled the band. Interestingly enough Crooks would work with Dylan again 20 years later on what is referred to as "The Bromberg Sessions." Two tracks were released from those sessions on Bootleg Series, Vol. 8, Tell Tale Signs.

Still there is a not-bad rendering of "Simple Twist of Fate" that opens Disc Two and shows what might have been if they really worked on it. But Dylan is a 'live in the studio' guy who prefers to work really fast, get the song down and move on. There have been reports by various musicians involved that Dylan would be running down the next song on guitar in the control booth while the musicians were trying to listen to the last song they cut. More perplexing considering they were a country band is that they didn't get close to nailing the most country sounding song on the album, "You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go." On the first take Dylan runs down the song, humming the melody, which is fun to hear. They try it fast, they try it slow, and somewhere in between and it simply does not come together.

Before recording "You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome," Dylan or engineer Phil Ramone told the rest of the band to take a break and Dylan cut four takes of "Idiot Wind" with just bass player Tony Brown. Full disclosure. Tony Brown is my brother, so yeah I'm gonna be a bit prejudiced. These takes define what I mean by less is more. On take 1, he is almost gentle on his vocal, letting the words of the song take over and do the work for him. That changes on Take 3 where his phrasing becomes a lot more venomous and that venom pretty much remains for the next two takes. One other thing about "Idiot Wind" appearing where it does - when I told my brother that the set was coming out last winter,

after looking at the sessionography at first in the Dylan book *All The Songs*, and also on Olof Bjorner's excellent site [About Bob Dylan](#), - he said to me, "That's not the way I remember it going down." It would be easy to attribute this to faulty memory, except 44 years ago, when I asked him about the sessions, he told me first day with Deliverance, second day him alone and with Paul Griffin.

What Bob Dylan had no way of knowing at the time was Tony Brown was a Dylan fan since 1963, had the albums, had sung many of the songs, and being a serious musician had paid attention to what the other players on Dylan albums were doing. In the case of these sessions in particular, he studied Charlie McCoy's bass playing on John Wesley Harding, which he talks about in more technical detail in the book, *A Simple Twist Of Fate* by Kevin Odegard (guitarist for the Minneapolis sessions) and Andy Gill.

Disc 3 is where the sessions start to intensify, starting off with a sort of slow "Tangled Up In Blue" and continuing with "You're A Big Girl Now," take one with Paul Griffin on organ and take two with Buddy Cage on pedal steel, in addition to Griffin and Brown. Griffin played piano and organ on several tracks on *Highway 61 Revisited* and the truly astounding piano part on "One Of Us Must Know (Sooner Or Later)" on *Blonde On Blonde*. Take 2 was originally included on the test pressing and released on Biograph.

After briefly rehearsing the song with Griffin, Dylan does a much faster "Tangled" with Griffin on organ. Maybe it's the tempo Dylan set for the song or perhaps Griffin was playing with "Highway 61" in mind, but his organ is a little too circus-like and doesn't convey the mood of the song. Griffin successfully switches to piano for "Spanish Is The Loving Tongue."

Next comes one of the more fun tracks of the set, a funky "Call Letter Blues" with Griffin on piano, which is followed by "You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go" with Griffin staying at the piano, mixed pretty far in the background. Then comes the very first take of "Shelter From The Storm," with Griffin on piano. This take appeared on the soundtrack to *Jerry McGuire*, though on the album the bass was removed and the piano is barely audible. That's it for the Griffin sessions, except for one unfortunate omission I'll get to later on.

Dylan's method of operation at this point seems to be try a song and if it's not working try another song and come back to that song later. In the studio with just Tony Brown he does take 1 of "Buckets Of Rain." It's close to the album version, but not quite there as the call and response between Dylan's guitar and the bass had yet to fully develop.

Next is another version of "Tangled" with Dylan emphasizing the chord slide he does at the beginning. Another take of "Buckets" comes next with Dylan putting a bit more into the vocal. The way he sings "buckets of moonbeams" is something special. This is followed by three more takes of "Shelter From The Storm." On the first of these (take 2) the bass doesn't come in until the second verse. On the next take he slows it down a bit but loses it in the middle and the song stops. Take 4 is the version from the album.

Disc Four starts out with "You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go" at a pace slower than the final version. The way Dylan sings the line "Situations have ended bad" should make any Dylan fan smile. On the next take they nail it, and this is the one that appears on the album.

The next day Dylan attempts "Buckets Of Rain" again, this time alone. It was the only song he would cut that day. Perhaps the rest of the day was spent mixing and listening. On the first take he almost gets through the whole song then blows the finger picking guitar part. He blows it in a way any guitar player professional or amateur should appreciate. On the second take he screws up again a couple of times in a different places, but keeps on going. On the 3rd take Dylan apparently had started playing. This may have been meant as an insert because he starts with the third verse. In any case the song stops after the guitar break. The next take is also aborted.

On the next day Dylan starts by revisiting "Up To Me" The first take starts in the middle, but the second take is complete though a bit slower than the Biograph version and Dylan sounds a little hoarse. On this version Dylan does a cool descending riff on guitar that is on all the versions except the previously released one. Still he's not totally on in this take.

He then goes back to Buckets of Rain for four takes finally nailing it on the fourth, resulting in the album version. He then tries "If You See Her, Say Hello" for the first time with Brown, and they get it in one take, which appeared on the test pressing.

Next comes three takes of "Up To Me," with the first at a pretty fast clip but Dylan aborts it after a couple of verses. The next take is equally fast, but the way he sings the final verse is full of emotion taking the song to a whole other level followed by a harp solo. This version in its own way is every bit as good as the version on Biograph. The third take is slowed down to a more moderate pace and it's always interesting to see how he puts the emphasis on different lines and words each time around. The song contains some of the greatest lines Dylan ever wrote such as "I was just too stubborn to ever be governed by enforced insanity" and "In 14 months I only smiled once and I didn't do it consciously."

This is followed by a brief instrumental rehearsal of "Buckets Of Rain," which is followed by two takes of "Meet Me In The Morning." The first is the version released on the "Duquesne Whistle" single and the second slightly slower and doesn't really go anywhere. Dylan then again tries "Buckets Of Rain" one more time perhaps not realizing he had the album take and what happens is very similar.

Disc five starts off with an instrumental rehearsal of "Tangled" which ends with some sweet guitar licks from Bob where he may have been thinking of another song entirely. On the third take they come up with the version that was on the test pressing. Though the notes say this is the version that was on the Bootleg Series, Vol. 1-3, that was a different take. This was the session that would yield the most usable takes. As Jeff Slate says in the liner notes, "Reading each other's moves almost telepathically, they search for the performance that Dylan will deem worthy of release." There are two takes of "Simple Twist Of Fate," the second one making the album.

After a brief two minute rehearsal, comes the "Up To Me" previously on Biograph. A rehearsal and an aborted take of "Idiot Wind" comes next. This is followed by two versions of take 4, the first just Dylan with bass and the second with an organ overdub by Paul Griffin. Now in the track list (which includes musician credits), it says this is the same version that was on Bootleg Series Vol. 1-3 and also on the test pressing of the album (aka the New York Sessions). There is one problem with this. It is not the version on the test pressing. I have A/B'd it several times since receiving the set, and besides

that, that version has been ingrained in my mind for 43 years since I taped my brother's acetate. Griffin's organ on that version is totally different, and quite a bit more subtle. He slips in and out of the verses and his part builds in one slow brooding burn, and by Dylan's harmonica solo at the end the organ and Dylan's harp mesh to become the wind. On the version on *More Blood*, the organ is more out front and at the very end Griffin plays dissonant chording that is reminiscent of Garth Hudson. That the test pressing version is not on this set is at the very least an unfortunate omission since a lot of people myself included consider it a high point of the New York sessions.

The answer may be in the track by track portion of Jeff Slate's liner notes: "The producers have also chosen to include the raw take without Paul Griffin's overdub." The question is why especially since they'd already released that version on the first *Bootleg Series*.

Another take of "You're A Big Girl Now" comes next, but fades out before the last verse. Two more takes of "Meet Me In The Morning" follow, but the first is aborted, and then Dylan tries a totally different approach slowing it down and is half talking, half singing, before abandoning that too. At this point Mick Jagger, visiting from a session next door, suggests Dylan play slide, to which Dylan responds, "I don't want to play slide," and then there's a short bit of him playing slide, but when he hits a wrong note, says, "Not me." Jagger says, "I'll play it," and Dylan laughs.

Disc Six opens with another attempt at "You're A Big Girl Now," Dylan gives it a couple of short tries, stops and says, "We ain't gonna do it better. I just keep hearing that organ."

After a couple of rehearsals, and apparently still not sure he has what he wants Dylan does one last take of "Tangled Up In Blue." At first he sounds tired and a little hoarse, but as the song goes on his brilliant phrasing takes over and he starts delivering certain lines that just go right to your spine and it ends up being a remarkable take as well as the end of the New York sessions.

Late in December 1974, Bob Dylan went into the studio again at Sound 80 studio in Minneapolis and recut half the album with a group of Minneapolis musicians: Chris Weber and Kevin Odegard on guitar; Peter Ostroushko, mandolin; Greg Inhofer, keyboards; Billy Peterson bass and Bill Berg, drums. With the exception of bass and keyboards, there were no electric instruments. The solos were Dylan's harmonica breaks, and what was created was a lush acoustic ambiance surrounding the songs.

On several of the songs Dylan took a more aggressive vocal approach, the keys were changed from the New York sessions and "Tangled Up In Blue" was speeded up and "Idiot Wind" turned from the slow burning dirge of New York into an out and out rocker. There is no doubting the power of any of these tracks, and as writer/musician Elijah Wald said to me in an interview a few years ago when we were discussing different versions of songs by various artists, "Why can't I have both?" And while I prefer the melancholy blue feel of "Tangled" that appeared on the test pressing, it is doubtful it would have received the airplay on FM rock stations the Minnesota version received and the same can be said for "Idiot Wind."

Still, in re recording the songs and through rearrangements and lyric changes, the Minnesota tracks created a slight distance between the singer and the material. The personal immediacy of many of the songs is not as hard hitting. As Robbie Robertson writes in his autobiography, *Testimony* about the New York version, "It was tough, bold and dark, more powerfully personal than anything I'd heard him do in a long time." And

then comparing the two versions, "This new version was more up-tempo and energetic, but the first recordings he had played for me still stuck in my mind." The Minnesota versions however do have their own strengths. I remember listening to the then brand new album with a close friend back in the days when listening to albums with friends was a regular occurrence and when "If You See Her, Say Hello" (which opens and closes this set) came on, he said, "Bob is so sad."

Blood On The Tracks has often been referred to as the greatest breakup album of all time. It was known at the time that Dylan had separated from his wife Sara though they would reconcile to divorce a few years later. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that all the songs are about that relationship. More than 20 years ago, a friend well versed in Bob said to me, "Did you ever consider that in "Tangled Up In Blue" it could be a different woman in every verse?"

The Bootleg Series has always been about more than just presenting rare tracks and outtakes. In this case it provides an in-depth look at how Bob Dylan operates in the studio and his creative process. While some takes are certainly similar, no two are exactly the same. There might be lyric changes, tempo changes or a difference in vocal approach. Dylan fans will now be able to create a few versions of the New York sessions. When I recorded my album, the engineer who was also for all intents and purposes the producer said to me, "We are operating on the idea that your first instinct is usually correct." Whether in the case of Blood On The Tracks Bob Dylan should have gone with his first instinct will be a matter of debate for years to come. Either way More Blood, More Tracks has already brought me hours of pure listening enjoyment and wonder.

From A Rolling Thunder to a Hard Rain

Rolling Thunder was a revue, a gypsy-like circus of performers backed by one band. It may have had something to do with the eve of the bicentennial (see both Dylan's and Ginsburg's liner notes to Desire) but was also part payback to various artists who had helped Dylan out in one way or another, Baez, Jack Elliott, Roger McGuinn. And more than being a tribute to American music, though it did cover many genres, it was an attempt to resurrect a certain spirit, the spirit of "music in the cafes at night and revolution in the air." It was also an attempt to counteract what Dylan has since referred to as the superficialness of his return to touring in '74, which is another discussion entirely.

Dylan was not going through the motions on either of the Rolling Thunder Tours. It was a ragtag, crazy band, and the show had an element of craziness and fun throughout, along with a sense of anything could happen. What the Rolling Thunder Band may have lacked in technical musicianship (they certainly didn't have the professional cohesion of The Band), they made up for in spirit.

The show had two parts, the first part emceed by Bob Neuwirth who for better or worse also sang many songs, along with contributions from each member of Guam (the band) who sang, T-Bone Burnett, Steve Soles, Rob Stoner and Mick Ronson. Various surprise guests would appear. At the show I saw, Rick Danko (with Allen Ginsberg on tambourine) did the live performance debut of the about to be released, "It Makes No Difference",

from the Band album, Northern Lights/Southern Cross. You KNEW you were never gonna see THAT again. The performers were also in costumes, and wearing makeup. Some like T-Bone would change costumes, T-Bone was at times a wizard, at other times a cowboy. The songs themselves had an anything could happen feel- Mick Ronson, doing his "Life on Mars," for instance.

Following Jack Elliott's set (2 songs solo, 2 songs with the band) Dylan would almost by magic appear on-stage. You didn't see him walk on. He was just suddenly there, pancake makeup, a scarf or two draping his vest and shirt. He was magnetic, and intense, his eyes like beacons, his set an adventure. If Tour '74 was a fairly straight-forward run through of his catalog, this was the beginning of his messing with his songs in a big way. "Tonight I'll Be Staying Here With You" saw a crazy change in the lyrics ("Throw my mattress out the window/throw my TV out there too"). "Hard Rain" became a blues, "Hattie Carroll" a marching rock waltz, almost a clipped dirge march. And there were the new songs from the then unreleased Desire. Isis found Dylan guitarless doing a crazy dance. And while the music was going on there'd be often comic interaction between the band members. At the end of Dylan's set a curtain would come down and there'd be a brief intermission.

The second half would start with the curtain still closed and you'd hear acoustic guitars strumming. The curtain would rise to Dylan and Baez singing "Times They Are A-Changin'" or "Blowin' In The Wind." They would do a few songs together usually including an old folk or country song like "Dark Is The Dungeon," as well as Johnny Ace's, "Never Let Me Go." Dylan would leave and Baez would begin her set also taking over as emcee. Again various performers and guest artists would come out. At the show I saw (Hartford) the guest artist was Sandy Bull, a guitarist who also played other instruments. At this show he played some crazy thing on the oud taking you down some middle east rambling raga like road that found various revue members dancing. Roger McGuinn then took the stage and together with Mick Ronson would do a fairly amazing version of "Eight Miles High," followed by "Chestnut Mare." At the end of the song, T-Bone, a cowboy this time right down to chaps and spurs would lasso him.

Dylan would then appear alone with his harp holder on and sit down on a stool and do two songs. The video clip of "Tangled" from "Renaldo & Clara" captures this part of the show perfectly. The band would return and Dylan would do more songs from Desire, including "Hurricane," as well as "Just Like A Woman" and "Heaven's Door," and the show would end with everyone on stage in a close to western swing version of "This Land Is Your Land."

In some ways, it approximated the early Revue tours, but if you saw the show it was a lot more than that. Much more. While Horde, Lollapalooza etc., do have a lot of acts, they are not a revue. They are traveling festivals. In a revue, one band backs up everybody, and there can be varying amounts of interplay on the parts of the performers, appearing in different combinations etc. That is what happened on Rolling Thunder. It also tied in various aspects of Dylan's influences as well as his past (Jack Elliott, Baez, Ginsberg, McGuinn) with what he was creating at the time Blood On The Tracks, Desire, with the promise of the future (the then, many new, younger musicians who comprised the band) tying in as well, poetry, art, theatre, dance and a sense of drama in a fairly crazy, circus like atmosphere, where you felt anything could happen. This feeling was heightened by

various guest artists. You never knew who was gonna show up and what would happen if they did.

Dylan was never more masterful, mystical and magical, playing all his roles at once, while adding new ones—each with a sense of timelessness, backed by a knowing intensity, taking you back and forth, seeming to burst on the stage out of nowhere—unlike all the other members un-introduced, playing the joker, the trickster, the poet, the clown, the actor and the minstrel, coming out alone (how long has it been since that happened), delivering dynamite yet intimate renditions of “Love Minus Zero” and “I Don’t Believe You” with that dead-on, laser beam, magnetism that makes the song and performance all you know about while it’s happening, grabbing total hold on your heart, soul and spine. There was far more happening in that Revue to go into here. And yes, the idea may have come from the ’50s, rockers along with vaudeville, carnivals and the circus, but Dylan with the help of a lot of friends turned it into something far more.

There were actually two Rolling Thunder tours. The first was in the late fall of ’75 and was in the Northeast (mainly New England, upstate NY and Canada). The second was in the late winter and spring of ’76 and hit the South and Southwest. ’75 is easily superior. The spirit had gone on ’76 and Dylan sounds not only strained but forced. Of course there are some exceptions. The influence of a certain white powder is quite obvious and while I understand some people liking the edginess, the band is not as together and quite often not in tune. ’76 had its moments, but the sound of the band had changed, and more importantly the vibe had also changed.

Isis was something that had to be seen and I have yet to hear a version from ’76 that comes close to ’75 musically or otherwise. The acoustic stuff is universally good both years. But while the stop/start arrangements of ’76 may be more “interesting” whatever that’s supposed to mean, it doesn’t mean they were necessarily improved. Often instruments are simply not in tune, crashing into one another and Bob’s singing is often exaggerated, or more to the point, over-emoting. The dawn of Dylan self-parody.

There are rare moments such as the San Antonio “Spanish Is The Loving Tongue” which stands a chance of blowing away all live performances from 76, 75 and 74. But the acoustic songs and the duets with Joan Baez, whether acoustic or electric, but particularly the acoustic ones such as “Railroad Boy” and “Deportees” are amazing.

On “Shelter From The Storm” Dylan’s electric guitar is outrageously out of tune and he had apparently forgotten how to play slide guitar which he once knew how to do. It’s fun to watch the same way Maggie’s Farm is fun to watch, but any semblance of subtlety is severely lacking. Whereas the studio track which has never been bettered in any live performance gives you a sense of mystery, a sense of those other lifetimes, the main emotion on the Hard Rain version is anger. The shouting of the last word of each line is (such as always safe and WARM) is substantially no different than the shouting from Tour ’74. And of course the cocained calamity of Guam while charming in a rough way comes nowhere near approaching the soulful proficiency or the intensity of The Band.

I’ve never considered Hard Rain a reinvention of the thin, wild Mercury sound. I always thought of it as Dylan going after the more demented Neil Young sound around at that

time. The guitars that crash like cars. The Southern tour included Kinky Friedman and had a much different vibe to it and was musically a bit more psychotic. But the show I was lucky enough to see in Hartford still ranks years later as one of the most amazing things I ever saw.

Street Legal

1978 was a brutal year for Bob Dylan. It started with him uncharacteristically giving innumerable interviews to not only music magazines, but every magazine and newspaper who wanted one, to promote his nearly four-hour film, *Renaldo & Clara*, which thanks to the critics, was pretty much dead on arrival. The *Village Voice* had an assassination squad of four reporters destroy it. In Philadelphia, it was shown for one day. I attended the showing and while it wasn't as bad as the critics said, there was a lot wrong with it. My favorite review of it was by Joe Baltake in the *Philadelphia Daily News*, who summed it up with, "Inside *Renaldo & Clara* is a great little movie dying to get out." The biggest problem with the film was it couldn't decide if it was a concert film, though it had amazing footage of several full-length songs, a tour documentary, or as Dylan insisted, really had a story line. Thinking about it later I came up with the theory that every man in the film represented Bob Dylan in one way or another and every woman was his (by the time it came out) former wife Sara or possibly Joan Baez. Either way, the great line from "Desolation Row," I rearranged their faces and gave them all another name certainly applied.

1978 also found Bob Dylan with a new personal manager, Jerry Weintraub, since breaking ties with Albert Grossman approximately a decade before and putting together pretty much for the first time his own band. The Band (although at the time they were *Levon & The Hawks*) were already together as a unit when he hired them and the core unit of the *Rolling Thunder Revue* band were also playing together when they were enlisted. Dylan initially hired three people from the *Rolling Thunder* tour (who at this point were also members of the *Alpha Band*), bassist Rob Stoner, multi-instrumentalist David Mansfield on violin, pedal steel and mandolin, and rhythm guitarist and singer Steve Soles. Most of the other musicians with the exception of drummer Ian Wallace, percussionist Bobbye Hall, and sax player Steve Douglas, who had played with Duane Eddy and was also a member of the Los Angeles studio aces known as "The Wrecking Crew," were for the most part unknown. Dylan also decided that for the first time he would have a trio of women backup singers. Weintraub had a massive world tour booked, which would start in Japan (Dylan's first time there) and continue into New Zealand and Australia, then return to the US, with Europe on the calendar for the summer and a tour of the entire continental United States, with some stops in Canada, in the fall. Both Weintraub and the Japanese promoters were pressuring Dylan to do a greatest hits show and in a sense he capitulated, except most of the songs were radically rearranged. Dylan at that point was no stranger to rearranging his songs for live performance, but the 78 tour were by far the most out-there versions yet. Some worked, some didn't.

Street Legal was recorded upon returning from the first leg out the tour in April, 1978, but before recording, Dylan made a major change in the band, replacing Rob Stoner with bassist Jerry Scheff, best known for being a member of Elvis Presley's TCB band. It wouldn't be Dylan's only nod to Elvis. At his concerts he started wearing stage clothes that were a bit too close to what Presley wore onstage in his final years. For whatever reason, Dylan decided to record the album at his rehearsal studio in Santa Monica, using a mobile recording unit instead of going into an actual recording studio.

To put Street Legal in the context of the times and new releases by his contemporaries, the week before it appeared, The Rolling Stones released their best album in years, *Some Girls*, that July The Kinks released *Low Budget*, and in the fall Van Morrison issued *Wavelength*.

Many music critics decided to continue their assault on Dylan. "Never so utterly fake," Greil Marcus exclaimed in *Rolling Stone*. However not everyone (including me) felt that way. Right around the time the album came out, a disc jockey named Steven Clean on WMMR, Philly's top FM rock station, played the entire album, and said at the end, "What a great Bob Dylan album!" Not long after that, it might've been a couple of weeks or maybe days, Clean vanished from WMMR.

Most Dylan fans consider *Blood On The Tracks* to be his great divorce album, though the actual divorce wouldn't happen for three years. And it has to be said that *Blood On The Tracks* has an emotional intensity that remains unmatched. *Street Legal* reveals a man who has been emotionally devastated and is trying to pick himself up from the ruins. It's an album that's murky and muddy in sound – the critics would have a field day with that aspect – but also in lyrical content. While most of the songs allude to a breakup, throughout many of the songs there is a sense of foreboding that at times, especially now, seems acutely prophetic.

The opening song, "Changing Of The Guards" is quite possibly the most alienated song Dylan ever wrote. At the same time it is kind of a return to the what Dylan called "the thin wild mercury sound" of *Blonde On Blonde*, particularly in the use of the organ, while others have claimed the sax is a nod to Springsteen. The opening line, "Sixteen years, sixteen banners united" clearly refers to the sixteen years since Dylan's first album, and the sixteen banners, marks *Street Legal* as Dylan's 16th studio album (not counting the soundtrack, *Pat Garrett and Billy The Kid*). It's an epic song that is both biographical ("Fortune calls/I stepped forth from the shadows, to the marketplace/Merchants and thieves, hungry for power") to the mystical and political. One note, on the remixed and remastered version issued in 1999, they let the track go on a little longer to include an organ flourish at the end. While it's fun to hear, the original track fades out at precisely the right time. Either way, 40 years later "Changing Of The Guard" remains a track I can rarely listen to just once. Every time I play it, I have to play it again.

The rest of side one is a bit more problematic and probably played a big hand in the negative reviews. "New Pony" is on one hand a typical Dylan blues song, but it is also one of the nastiest songs in feel he ever wrote and his vocal is one of his nastiest, especially on the line "Sometimes I Wonder what's going on with Miss X." Throughout the song, the background singers answer each line with "How much longer?" which on one hand sort of works, but on the other hand grows tedious.

"No Time To Think" could have been great and remains a fascinating failure, but one with numerous intriguing lines. Part of the problem is the heavy-handedness of the backup singers who sing on alternate verses. While David Mansfield's violin part is gorgeous, there's something almost Broadway-ish about the melody, that ultimately detracts from the song. Still there's certain lines such as "Fools making laws for the breaking of jaws/And the sound of the keys as they clink," that are hard to ignore.

"Baby Stop Crying" sounds like a copy of a Dylan song. It was released as a single, but ultimately the chorus which goes on too long is overdone and the song goes nowhere.

Side Two, however, is a different story. The critics had a field day with "Is Your Love In Vain?" mainly because of the line, "Can you cook and sew, make flowers grow?" However, in the context of the song – politically incorrect or not – it makes total sense. It's a great non-love song that winds up being a love song, a portrait of a man who is totally emotionally broken who knows he's not ready to be anything close to being a fit companion or anyone including himself. It has one of my favorite lines about depression, "When I am in the darkness, why do you intrude?"

"Senor (Tales of Yankee Power)" is one of the great Dylan songs of all time, and the one song from "Street-Legal" he performed well into "The Never Ending Tour," the last performance (so far) in 2011. Both ominous and mystical, it veers back and forth between personal and political, opening with the lines, "Senior, señor, do you know where we're headin'? Lincoln County Road or Armageddon?" It is part "Waiting For Godot," and part cinematic journey. The line about the painted wagon reminds me of Fellini. The tension in the song never lets up, and the final verse about let's overturn these tables, disconnect these cables, references of course Jesus cleansing the temple of moneychangers, but also is evocative of a band breaking down after a gig or perhaps a recording session.

"True Love Tends To Forget" is the weakest song on side two, but the bridge is memorable as well as the line, "Every day of the year's like playin' Russian roulette."

"We Better Talk This Over" is one of the great overlooked Dylan songs. It is also Dylan pretty much doing Waylon Jennings, complete with Waylon's marching beat, and I've long wondered if anyone ever suggested to Waylon he do the

song, because he would've done a great version. It's a song about realizing that a great relationship is over and done with, yet the singer is torn between realizing it's over and not wanting it to end. At the same time he does so with both compassion and humor, and the realization that both parties are at fault. One of my favorite lines from the song is, "It'd be great to cross paths in a day and a half/Look at each other and laugh."

The album concludes with "Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)" which is a brilliantly constructed song. Treading on the same musical territory as "Like A Rolling Stone," the song builds continually as it describes the end of a relationship. Dylan is particularly powerful on the second part of each verse, but especially on the lines, "There's a lion in the road, there's a demon escaped/There's a million dreams gone, there's a landscape being raped," and again on the last verse where almost shouting he sings, "I can't believe it, I can't believe I'm alive/But without you it just doesn't seem right."

So after 40 years, is *Street Legal* a perfect album? Not at all. But its great moments and there's plenty to go around are truly great and as real as it gets.

Dylan's Gospel Revisited

In 1979, Bob Dylan did what a lot of his fans had been hoping he'd do for years and returned to playing full blown, blues-based electric rock and roll, with a few acoustic guitar-based ballads thrown in for good measure. Many of the songs seemed to deal with contemporary issues and a couple almost sounded like protest songs. However this time, there was no great search for what the songs meant or were about. The message couldn't have been more clear and direct: salvation by believing in Jesus Christ. Dylan fans used to questioning and pondering were left to dwell on one question, why did this happen at this time? Many fans dropped him then and there. Eventually many came back, some never did.

I'd been tipped off this was going to happen several months before *Slow Train Coming* was released by a singer-songwriter buddy of mine, and I wasn't that surprised. I'd been expecting it since John Wesley Harding, a feeling that was reinforced when I managed to get a reel-to-reel copy of what would eventually be known as *The Basement Tapes* at the end of 1968.

When *Slow Train Coming* came out in August 1979, I bought it immediately and despite having qualms about some of the lyrics, I thought it was one of Dylan's best albums. Producer Jerry Wexler captured the right sound at the right time and I dug certain cool touches only he would've done like the subtle horns on "Precious Angel." The drawing on the cover of the workers with a pick axe (signifying a cross) laying down the rails while the train comes up behind reminded me of something you might find on a Folkways Records album cover of

labor songs. But what made the album great along with the production and superb musicians like the then new guitar genius Mark Knopfler was Dylan's singing. It was as intense, passionate and committed as he could get and it really didn't matter whether I or anyone else disagreed with or had questions about this particular message. Thirty-eight years later, my feelings about that album haven't changed one bit. When Dylan sang the lines (on "Precious Angel") Can they imagine the darkness that will fall from on high/When men will beg God to kill them and they won't be able to die, it was enough to scare the shit out of you.

That said, there are several lines on the song "Slow Train Coming," and on other songs like "Change My Way Of Thinking" and "When You Gonna Wake Up" that are downright infuriating, and to be clear there are great lines on all those songs as well. Why Dylan chose to embrace a form of Christianity that seemed to encompass the right-wing born again movement occurring at the time is anyone's guess.

On Christmas Eve 1968, I was living in New York City, and was visiting one of my closest friends in Philly. At the time, he was a film student and suggested we go see Pasolini's *The Gospel According To Saint Matthew* at a repertory theater. Shot in grainy black and white, it is a straightforward depiction of that Gospel with music that included Bach, the African Mass, "The Missa Luba," spirituals by Odetta and the blues of Blind Willie Johnson. In addition to being a filmmaker, Pasolini was a writer, a poet, an intellectual, gay and a communist. Christ is portrayed as a radical peasant. He's tough, doesn't suffer fools and you see the divinity in his eyes when he encounters children or a leper. It's a powerful film, not at all a Hollywood depiction of Christ. When they roll away the stone at the end, it's almost enough to make you believe right there. The point to telling this story is I knew there could be another version of Christ than the one Dylan portrayed, which is mostly about belief without question, hellfire damnation and most of all, apocalypse. On the other hand, Bob Dylan's been singing about the end of the world pretty much since he started recording.

This still controversial period of Dylan's career has now been revisited with *Trouble No More, The Bootleg Series Volume 13/1979-1981* (Columbia Legacy) a mammoth eight-disc and (finally) one DVD set that includes 101 songs on the audio portion including two complete concerts from 1980 and 1981. Unlike the last Bootleg Series, *The Cutting Edge*, the producers didn't provide every take from every session, instead selecting tracks from concerts, studio outtakes and rehearsals covering a three-year period, making for a more pleasurable and varied listening experience. As usual Dylan fans are already quibbling about the selections. And I have a couple of quibbles myself about a couple of live tracks where there's lyric flubs. But like any serious Dylan fan, I have other versions I can listen to.

The liner notes are comprised of four articles. The introduction by Ben Rollins goes into what the producers were hoping to accomplish with this set, explaining

the sources of the recordings and stressing that they were going for performance above everything else. He also makes it quite clear that in compiling this box, the producers were aware this was and potentially still is controversial. The second set of notes, "Fire In My Bones," by Amanda Pertrusich deals with the societal and political implications of Dylan's conversion and the effect it had on his followers. The track by track by music journalist Rob Bowman delves deep into what Dylan and his musicians are doing musically, but also provides many of the sources of the scriptural lines in the songs. It is the best track by track since John Bauldie's notes on the very first Bootleg Series. In the accompanying photo book, *Pressing On*, Penn Jillette writes about how to be an atheist and a Dylan fan and love these songs regardless of your religious persuasion. Included in the book are typed copies of the lyrics with various changes Dylan made while working on them.

The first two discs are various live performances, the second two are rare and unreleased songs and/or performances. There are songs that no one knew existed as well as alternate takes of songs that never circulated in the underground Dylan bootleg community.

In November 1979, Dylan started touring behind *Slow Train Coming* opening with a 16-night stand at San Francisco's Warfield Theater. Backing him was one of the best bands he ever put together. The basic unit of the band would stay together for the next three years. Bassist Tim Drummond and drummer Jim Keltner were generally considered one of the best rhythm sections in rock music. Fred Tackett was a seasoned session player. Spooner Oldham was a legendary Muscle Shoals keyboard player. Also on board were gospel organ player and singer, Terry Young and three backup singers, Regina McCrary, Helena Springs and Mona Lisa Young. It was the most disciplined and on target band Dylan would ever have, which is an almost heretical thing to say for a diehard Dylan and The Band fan like myself.

The controversy that ensued at the Warfield shows made the Newport debacle seem tame. Religious groups including Jews For Jesus were handing out tracts at the theater entrance. The show started with Regina McCrary telling a story about a gospel train, followed by a short set of gospel songs from the backup singers. Dylan would then take the stage, sing all the songs from *Slow Train Coming* and most of the songs that would appear on his next album, *Saved*. He did not sing any of his older songs. As word spread, at later concerts during the Warfield stand, fans would hold up signs that said "Jesus loves your old songs too." But you have to give him credit. On what was clearly a career killing move, he would not budge. Writer Paul Williams details all this in his book, *Dylan- What Happened?* which came out early in 1980. Dylan would often preach between songs, and well, a lot of what he said was way out there, and that's putting it mildly.

What Trouble No More makes abundantly clear is that three year period featured some of the most amazing concerts of Dylan's entire career, equal in intensity to the shows of 1966. While (the song) "Slow Train Coming" may have annoying

lines, it was one powerhouse in concert and different versions including an early rehearsal version from late in 1978 begin the first four discs.

Not all of Dylan's songs from this period are what I consider to be gospel music in a strict musical sense. Many of the songs are for lack of a better term typical Bob Dylan songs. But several of the songs such as "Covenant Woman," "In The Garden," "Saving Grace" and "What Can I Do For You" show him getting more adventurous in chord progressions as well as being some of his best melodies. Also in the best melodies category is the hymn, "When He Returns." There are four great versions on the set, a live one from Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1979, that is Dylan on guitar with Spooner Oldham on piano, an incredible outtake from the Slow Train sessions, and one on the Toronto concert. There is another one on the DVD with Dylan on piano that may or not be the same Toronto version (I haven't compared).

Some songs I consider to be straight gospel, like "Saved," worked far better in concert than in the studio. Several other gospel songs "Blessed Is The Name Of The Lord Forever," "I Will Love Him," "Jesus Is The One" and "City Of Gold," were only done in concert, and since (apparently) they were never done in the studio, may have been written expressly for that purpose, often serving as energetic rave-ups with the backup singers playing a big part.

It is clear that Dylan was working on several levels musically at this point, and in addition to gospel was writing songs that leaned towards R&B, particularly the soul music of Memphis and Muscle Shoals (which itself came out of gospel), reggae as well as of the hardest rockers of his career. And he had the band that could pull all of it off, sometimes combining all three. "Thief On The Cross" wanders into Rolling Stones territory, and there are two other songs that are also reminiscent of the Stones. "Yonder Comes Sin," which was leaked on bootlegs years ago has a guitar part that echoes "Jumpin' Jack Flash" while the chord progression on the previously unknown "Making A Liar Out Of Me" sounds suspiciously like "You Can't Always Get What You Want." However, I always considered "You Can't Always Get What You Want" to be Jagger and Richards writing a Dylan song (something they did more than once), so this brings it full circle. "Making A Liar Out Of Me" was recorded at a tour rehearsal in September 1980, and is one of the reasons the Bootleg Series are important and great. It has all the makings of a great Dylan song, but apparently was abandoned. These lines show that Dylan was starting to move on writing-wise:

So many things so hard to say as you stumble
To take refuge in your offices of shame
As the earth beneath my feet begins to rumble
And your young men die for nothin', not even fame

In November 1980, Dylan returned to the Warfield for 12 shows. At the urging of Bill Graham, he started including a few of his older songs in the set. Other musicians, Carlos Santana, Mike Bloomfield and Jerry Garcia dropped by during the show and joined Dylan onstage. He also included a few covers, but more

importantly debuted a few new songs that were not stridently religious. One of those songs, "Let's Keep It Between Us," which Bonnie Raitt did a fine cover of, is one of the songs seriously missing from this set. Two of those songs from the shows, "The Groom's Still Waiting At The Altar" and "Caribbean Wind" (in its only live performance) are included. The live version of "Groom" features Carlos Santana on a totally explosive lead. (There is an equally great version from the Warfield shows with Mike Bloomfield that appears on the box set *From His Head To His Heart To His Hands* released a few years ago.) The song also appears on Disc Four in a speedy studio version. The song contains one of my all-time favorite Dylan lines, "They mistake your shyness for aloofness, your silence for snobbery," and represent something of a return to Dylan writing lines that have a razor's edge. A different studio version of "Groom" was released on the flip-side of "Heart Of Mine," the first single from *Shot Of Love*, and an interesting thing happened, it started getting airplay, so much airplay that Columbia added it to the album. One of the few things Rob Bowman gets wrong in the liner notes is when he says it was only added to the compact disc. It was added to the vinyl version (long before compact discs), and is sitting on the shelf right behind me.

"Caribbean Wind" is a major work, and the live version features Dylan playing 12-string guitar, something that has rarely happened in concert. Dylan introduced the song by talking about Leadbelly doing children's songs, and how he was the same man who also sang blues songs. There is another version of the song on Disc Four that is slower and features Dylan on piano and Ben Keith playing gorgeous pedal steel guitar. No one knew about this version until this set. Both this and "Groom" emphasize one of the virtues of The Bootleg Series - they show how Dylan works on every level, as a songwriter and as a musician, constantly revising lyrics, changing chords, melodies and arrangements. Why these two songs (and "Angelina" from The Bootleg Series Vol. 1-3) were not on *Shot Of Love* will remain one of the great mysteries of Dylan recording decisions. It would've been a way different and far better album.

In 1981, it started to appear that changes were afoot. My first inkling was early in the year when through sheer luck or possibly divine intervention a thoughtful friend called me up and said, I had to come to his parents' house in the suburbs because an old high school friend was visiting and had a new Dylan song that I had to hear. The friend turned out to be Joel Bernstein, a photographer and musician best known for shooting Neil Young and CSNY album covers, who had worked with Dylan in 1976 and '78. When I arrived, Bernstein said I couldn't tape the song, but he'd play it as many times as I wanted. Now at the time I was extremely pissed off at Bob Dylan. The previous May I attended the only totally gospel Dylan show I saw in Hartford, Connecticut. The tour probably for good reason avoided playing the major cities of the East Coast. Before "Solid Rock," Dylan delivered what is generally referred to as The San Francisco rap, about iniquity in San Francisco. I was shocked and appalled and stayed that way for a long time, giving *Saved* a savage review in the program guide of the radio station I did shows at. (I've changed my opinion of *Saved* since that time.) The song was "Every Grain Of Sand," the piano version with Jennifer Warnes, Fred

Tackett, and a dog barking in the background that appeared on the very first Bootleg Series. My mind was totally blown. It was a major work of startling poetry that recalled William Blake. I thought it was one of the most beautiful songs I'd ever heard, and probably asked Joel to play it about ten times, which he totally understood. I didn't hear that version again for ten years. Two excellent versions of the song are on this set, a live one done at the last show of the '81 tour that is the best live version I've heard coming very close to the Shot Of Love version. The other is a rehearsal from September 1980 with celestial keyboards from Willie Smith. On both versions, Dylan doesn't mess with the feel, the lyrics on the melody.

One song from that Hartford show that stuck with me was "Ain't Gonna Go To Hell For Anybody," which is here two very different versions. The version from Montreal that appears on Disc Two (which is more than likely the version I saw a couple of weeks later) opens with an a cappella part by the background singers coming in one at a time, almost in a round) shows how good they really were. The song is close to being pure soul pop. The later version from the end of the year on Disc Four is faster, and the vocal intro has been dropped. In June 1981, I saw Dylan at the Merriweather Post Pavilion in Columbia, Maryland. The backup singers still opened the show, but there were lots of changes. There was a new keyboard player, William "Smitty" Smith who'd replaced both Spooner Oldham and Terry Young the previous fall, and an additional guitarist, Steve Ripley. Dylan did ten old songs including a beautiful "Girl From The North Country" highlighted by Smith's piano, as well as two covers, Dave Mason's "We Just Disagree" and Dion's "Abraham, Martin and John," sung as a duet with Clydie King, with both seated at the piano. But the song that validated my feeling things were changing was "Lenny Bruce," which is part of the London '81 concert included. There was no way a tribute to Lenny Bruce jibed with right-wing born again thinking. Another song at that show that grabbed me was "Dead Man, Dead Man" which would appear on the then unreleased Shot Of Love, and appears three times on the set in an outtake and two live versions from 1981. Both live versions are faster than the album version and feature a very cool twin guitar solo. Recorded only a few days apart, there are subtle differences, though the sound quality is better on the June 27th version, allowing you to hear more of the organ with drums more prominent. The outtake on Disc Four is way slower than the live versions, features only Clydie King on backup vocal, Benmont Tench on keyboard, Danny Kortchmar and Steve Ripley on guitars, and Dylan playing a very strange almost dissonant harmonica. There are also major changes in the lyrics including entire verses that were eventually abandoned.

After that show, Dylan toured Europe for the first time in three years, playing London for six nights. The concert the second night makes up discs seven and eight and is presented in full. Several other songs from that tour are presented throughout the set. From that tour are truly ferocious versions of "Slow Train Coming," "Gotta Serve Somebody" and "Shot Of Love."

In October, Dylan toured the US, playing parts of the Midwest, Canada, major East Coast cities, as well as several dates in the South. Unlike the previous gospel tours which played small theaters, this time he was playing arenas. Al Kooper had replaced Smitty Smith on keyboards resulting in Kooper resurrecting some of his classic organ on parts on such songs as "Like A Rolling Stone" and "I Want You." For the US tour, the opening set by the backup singers had been dropped from the show. For the Philly show, the first of three shows I saw that tour, he was bopping around the stage like a madman. Of the 26 songs at that show, 15 were written prior to the gospel albums and some song would change from show to show. There are two songs from that tour on the set, the previously mentioned "Every Grain Of Sand" and a slowed down version of "Solid Rock" that while not rocking as hard was every bit as effective generating a spookiness the fast versions did not have. [1981](#) was one of my favorite Dylan years. The band was on fire and he was at the top of his game. The London concert included is a fine representation.

The DVD is an hour-long film, *Trouble In Mind* that was shown once in various theaters across the US. It's been known for years that Dylan's shows at Massey Hall in Toronto in April 1980 were professionally filmed, and copies have circulated. In the past two years it was also revealed that the shows in Buffalo were filmed as well. The performance footage is stunning and ranks with the best of Dylan concert films. The film starts with a snippet of previously unknown version of the traditional song "Jesus Met The Woman At The Well" shot at a rehearsal studio, with Dylan on bass and Tim Drummond on guitar along with the rest of the band. It is followed by a pretty funny commercial for a 1980 Dylan concert in Portland, Oregon with various fan reaction. The opening song is "Are You Ready" which was usually the first song of the encore of the concerts at the time. As Dylan walks off stage afterwards his footsteps dissolve into those of Michael Shannon delivering the first of eight sermons, this one on hypocrisy. The sermons were written by writer Luc Sante at Dylan's request. Other topics, and sometimes the sermons are divided into parts include, virtue, temperance, justice and prudence. They're okay, but ultimately a one or two-time watch, and thankfully and thoughtfully you have the option of watching the concert footage without the sermons. The film ends with a beautifully intimate version of "Abraham, Martin and John," a hit for Dion but written by Dick Holler sung by Dylan and Clydie King both seated at the piano (with no other instruments). Every Dylan fan will want to see this. The song was performed in concert several times on the spring and summer 1981 tour.

Dylan and Clydie King who joined the backup singers in the spring of 1980 did two other duets in 1981, the Tommy Edwards hit, "It's All In The Game" during the fall tour, and a great and not well known Jimmy Webb song "Let's Begin" which debuted in June and was kept in the set during the fall tour. The latter song is part of the full 1981 London concert included in the set and a most welcome addition to the set. Of all the singers Dylan has done duets with over the years, Clydie King truly knew how to sing with him, and the song is a special moment.

Trouble No More makes it clear that the years from 1979 through 1981 were not by any means the lost years, whether or not you agreed with the direction he decided to take. Many of the songs here not previously recorded are as deep as anything he wrote. It also makes it quite clear that the live versions of the songs on *Saved* blow the studio versions out of the water, and that goes for a lot of the songs from *Shot Of Love* and *Slow Train Coming* as well. It was a creative time for Dylan both as a songwriter and a musician. The set also makes clear that Fred Tackett deserves consideration among the great Dylan guitar players. Check out his solo on "Bless Is The Name Of The Lord Forever," and there are many more that are equally on fire. It is also obvious that a lot of thought went into the selection and sequencing of the songs on this set. It is beyond question an important addition to The Bootleg Series.

Was 1981 the last really great tour?

It was Flag Day 1981, and I found myself driving south on I-95, taking a friend to see Bob Dylan at some place called the Merriweather Post Pavilion in Columbia, Maryland. It was her first Dylan concert and my tenth. During the ride, I was trying to explain to my friend what she may or may not see at the show, which considering this was Dylan is always a close to impossible task. I told her about *Slow Train Coming*, the all gospel concerts, and how the previous fall, Dylan had started doing some of his classic songs again. As we got closer to our destination we had turned off I-95 onto some new highway on the outskirts of Baltimore where there was a parade of green exit signs that all said "Nowhere." I was hoping it wasn't some kind of sign of things to come.

In May of 1980, I saw Bob Dylan at Bushnell Auditorium of Hartford, Connecticut. For whatever reason, Dylan's all gospel tours had stayed away from the larger cities on the East Coast. I was fully aware of what I was going to see. *Saved* had yet to be released, but I loved *Slow Train Coming*. Just entering the concert was a weird experience. On the steps of the hall, people who reminded me of Harry Dean Stanton in "Wise Blood," were handing out gospel tracts. Except for one new song, "Ain't Gonna Go To Hell For Anybody," the songs didn't hit me - and I was ready to be hit - and Dylan's between song raps, particularly what is usually referred to as "The San Francisco Rap" pissed me off. After the show, waiting for the group of people I'd traveled with to gather, Arlo Guthrie was hanging out. All a sudden, side doors burst open and Dylan and his backup singers surrounded by a group of rent a cops marched onto his bus. A few minutes later, Larry "Ratso" Sloman, then the editor of *High Times* magazine also entered the bus.

When *Saved* was released a couple of months later, I pretty much stayed unimpressed though that would change over time. I stayed unimpressed for a pretty long time. However, late the following winter, maybe in March or April of '81, one night a friend called me up saying I had to come over to his parent's house right away, that his friend Joel was there, and had a new Bob Dylan song that I had to hear. The house was in the suburbs. I managed to borrow a car

and went. Joel turned out to be photographer Joel Bernstein who had worked with Dylan in 1976 and again in 1978. The song was "Every Grain of Sand," the piano version with Dylan and Jennifer Warnes, and a dog barking in the background. Bernstein, who was a really nice guy said I could hear the song, but couldn't tape it. He graciously played it again and again. I was floored. It was by far the best Dylan song I'd heard in years. The melody was beautiful, the poetry reminded me of William Blake. Bernstein and I talked late into the night, in fact 'til early the next morning. It would be a decade before I heard that version of that song again.

Merriweather turned out to be a nice late afternoon concert, that if I remember correctly took place entire in daylight. Included were several new songs, and as it turned out, it would be the last time I'd see Dylan sing a new original song before an album was released. There were also some covers, "Abraham, Martin & John," and "We Just Disagree." The first of the new songs was "Dead Man, Dead Man," and the second was "Lenny Bruce," which considering the subject matter left me with the feeling Dylan was about to enter another phase. The third song, from what would turn out to be Shot Of Love was "Watered Down Love." At that point in time, Dylan had been working with the what was essentially same band for almost three years. Keyboard players and background singers had changed occasionally, but the superb rhythm section of Tim Drummond on bass and Jim Keltner on drums remained the same, along with lead guitarist Fred Tackett. At Merriweather, this was an additional; guitarist, Steve Ripley, and the keyboard player was William "Smitty Smith," who'd joined the band the previous fall. Smith's piano work on "Girl From The North Country" was the highlight of show, which ended with Dylan solo, playing guitar and harp on "Don't Think Twice."

After Merriweather, Dylan went to Europe for a series of spectacular shows. The set list grew considerably as more of his older songs were added. Recordings of those shows find Dylan totally at the top of his game. The arrangements made sense, the background singers never seemed out of place, and revisiting his then extensive catalog of songs, Dylan was making them come alive and shine again, almost as if he was remembering who he was and what he'd written.

In October, Dylan launched his first full scale arena tour since 1978, of the East Coast, parts of the Midwest, and parts of the South with a few stops in Canada as well. There was no opening set of gospel songs by the backup singers, the shows were long, with at least 23 and sometimes 30 songs, and on keyboards onstage with Dylan for the first time since 1965 was Al Kooper.

At his Philly show at the Spectrum, Dylan wearing a black leather coat, a white t-shirt, and shades he never removed opened with "Gotta Serve Somebody," bopping all over the stage like a madman. After, the second song, "I Believe In You," almost as if to get it out of the way, was "Like A Rolling Stone," followed by "I Want You" with Kooper replicating his organ parts on two of Dylan's biggest hits. Some of the songs would start with Dylan singing the first line without any

accompaniment or against an organ chord before the band kicked in. The set list was designed to include several special highlights, acoustic song with subtle backing, a duet with Clydie King, and newer songs interspersed with classics. All the songs would build dramatically, and Dylan would joke with the audience between songs sometimes asking questions, "Am I singing on key tonight," (asked at most concerts during the tour), and "What's the difference between North Philly and South Philly?" At Philly, the encore included a solo "It Ain't Me Babe," where Dylan did one of his favorite tricks of fooling the crowd when they tried to sing along on the "No, no, no" part, and singing it in a different place each time the chorus came up.

Two days later I saw Dylan again at Stabler Arena in Bethlehem, PA. It was a slight dip in the intensity and energy meter from Philly, but Dylan did sing "Happy Birthday" to Arthur Rosato who also played drums on the tour.

Two nights later Dylan played the Meadowlands Sports Complex, just outside New York City at the then very new Brendan Byrne Arena, which has undergone so many corporate name changes since I've totally lost track. This show has been in my top five Dylan shows for almost 30 years. He was not only incredibly on throughout the show, but incredibly funny. I remember coming off the New Jersey Turnpike, and seeing the arena in the distance looking like a gigantic spaceship, and early in the show, Dylan quipped, "might be acting a little strange right now.. That's because this is a mighty strange place. I ain't never seen nowhere like this."

We arrived to find we had close to the worst seats in the house, in the farthest corner in the highest balcony. It made no difference. On that tour Dylan would often sing at the top of his register, constantly toying with his phrasing. On "I Want You," he seemed to be holding back on the verses, then singing full steam on the bridge, which he repeated.

One of the more magical moments was "Girl From the North Country," with Dylan on acoustic, backed by very quiet bass, drums and lead guitar, which would kick in subtly on the second verse. Dylan sang passionately, sweetly with more tenderness that I'd ever seen him sing in concert before or since. When Dylan sang the line, "Many times I often prayed," it was with such emotion that the person I was with - the same person I took to Merriweather - gasped, and I then knew she understood everything I'd been trying to explain to her about Dylan on that trip four months before. Keep in mind that from where we were sitting, Dylan was pretty much a dot on the stage.

At many of the shows, Dylan would do a duet with Clydie King. In Philly, it was the classic, "All In The Game." At the Meadowlands, Dylan introduced the song by saying, "The songwriter who wrote this song, is here tonight. There's a lot of famous people here tonight. I just want to tell you that you might be sitting next to somebody that's famous." Then Dylan and King, their voices perfectly melding launch into an astonishingly beautiful Jimmy Webb song, I'd never heard before (or since by anyone else) called "Let's Begin." While I'd heard and seen

Dylan sing with many other people before and since, I don't think I've ever heard him sing quite as carefully as he did with Clydie King that night. At the end, Dylan said, "I hope we did it alright, Jimmy."

The next high point for me was midway through the show. Fred Tackett played a little intro lick, and then Dylan playing acoustic and singing immediately without any other instruments launched into a slow, almost spooky "The Times, They Are A-Changin'." Now Dylan had done this in the same arrangement at the two previous shows, but at the Meadowlands, it had a whole other edge. This is the reason why Bob Dylan's fans will go to more than one show on a tour, and collect hundreds if not thousands of recordings. You never know what song is gonna hit you and it can be different every night. On this night, the song was anything but the rallying cry of 1964. If anything it was a not quite look back at what didn't happen, and a warning cry for what was to come. After the fourth verse there was a harp solo, and until that time no instruments other than Dylan on guitar, then on the fifth verse, on the second line, a kick drum, followed by lead guitar, and then the bass and drums truly kicked in just for the harp solo.

Almost as if it was a couple of decades before, Dylan kept his Martin strapped on and began the next song, "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" alone. The band stayed remarkably in the background, with the backup singers coming in on the chorus, occasionally accented by Kooper playing gospel chords on the keyboard, Dylan's acoustic rhythm driving the song. On the last verse he is truly singing like a poet, letting the words do the work for him. On that night, this version of this song, comes as close to true Gospel music, Staple Singers gospel as anything he did.

Following "Hard Rain," moved to this then latest album with "Watered Down Love," introducing it by saying, "Well, what happens when hard rain falls, you get watered-down love," before a rocking "Masters Of War" with great jet bomber guitar by Steve Ripley. Then without accompaniment, Dylan sang the opening words to "Mr. Tambourine Man," at first just backed by his own rhythm guitar on a Fender Stratocaster until the band kicked in at the end of the first chorus. On the European tour, over the summer, Dylan had almost turned the melody inside out with incredible results. On the fall tour, he was singing a bit higher on his range, for much of the song he's really only singing two notes, but through some kind of magic makes it seem like a lot more. The band stays pretty much in the background with Kooper's organ dominating and playing what only can be called classic Al Kooper Dylan licks, allowing the whole performance to be Dylan's voice.

This was followed by "Solid Rock." Unlike the version on Saved, as well as one on previous tours, the song has been slowed down to a simmering burn based around the backup singers, and Keltner's drums, accentuated by very funky guitar work by Tackett and Ripley. It maintains that pace for the whole song. The pace of the show is then picked up by "Dead Man, Dead Man," which featured a cool twin guitar solo.

Again starting out alone, Dylan was into "Just Like A Woman," the band again in the background, with Kooper providing the original organ fill at the end of the verse.

Following "Heart of Mine," came perhaps the funniest moment of the night, when in introducing, "When You Gonna Wake Up," Dylan said, I want to say hello to all the editors of Rolling Stone magazine. All the editors and writers are here tonight I think, checking me out. They're gonna come backstage later, I'm gonna check them out." Then singing the first verse a cappella, Dylan launched into a heavy, rocking "When You Gonna Wake Up," which followed by "In The Garden," closed the main portion of the show. However, after the verses, ended, while the song was going on, Dylan both blew my mind and cracked me up by saying, "All right, hello. Thank you. I wanna say hello to Mr. and Mrs. Kooper who are out there tonight. Wherever they are, I wanna say greetings! I'm glad you could make it. Anyway this is Mr. and Mrs. Kooper's relative on keyboards over here. A man I've known for quite some time now. I'm not gonna tell you his name but that's him on keyboards. I should tell you his name anyway. Al Kooper is his name. Played with me twenty years. Maybe some of you heard of him, maybe some of you haven't. A legend in his own time though."

There were still three more songs for the encore, a slow gospel tinged, "Blowin' In The Wind," a searing solo acoustic, "It's Alright Ma," and a half reggae half gospel, "Knockin' On Heaven's Door."

That night particularly, and that little run of three concerts stayed with me for a long time, which turned out to be a good thing, because I wouldn't see Dylan in concert again until five years later. I've seen Dylan in concert more than a hundred times since that October night in 1981. I've seen some great shows, some good shows, some shows that were merely okay, and a couple of bad shows. All of the shows, even the bad ones had moments. But none featured as many songs, out of 28 performed, Dylan sang 27, and while some have come close, none have matched it for sheer consistent intensity of performance throughout.

Infidels - Return of the Tambourine Man

Bob Dylan's new album, *Infidels* (Columbia) shows him to be in complete control of all his artistic powers and skills. For those who have viewed Dylan's work as one of continuous artistic progression this will come as no surprise. All the facets of Dylan's style that long ago set him apart from other singer-songwriters have been forged together for maximum intensity, with dramatic results.

The back-up musicians, Mark Knopfler (of Dire Straits) and former Rolling Stone, Mick Taylor on guitars, reggae musicians Sly Dunbar on drums and Robbie Shakespeare on bass, along with Dire Straits keyboard man Alan

Clark, play with taste and care, At times they're a little too restrained almost as if they're trying to keep out of Dylan's way.

Dylan makes the most of the room he's been given. He sings as if he's living out the songs right there. Close listening, however, reveals that the sparseness of the arrangements is deceptive. New solos or instruments keep appearing, leaving you wondering where they were when you first listened. This group plays with a precision Dylan usually avoids, while forsaking none of the spontaneity he insists on.

This is probably due to the influence of Mark Knopfler who co-produced the album with Dylan. The Dire Straits albums Knopfler produced are meticulous affairs each tune grandly leading into the next. Knopfler himself is a songwriter heavily influenced by Dylan and probably understands his music as well as anyone. He also knows how to apply modern studio technology to Dylan's 'let's get this over with as soon as possible' method of recording.

It was the power and insight of his writing that first gained Dylan attention in 1963, and it is the writing that stands out here. Using cascading images that light up as he sings them, the songs overflow with references that are personal and political as well as spiritual, musical and literary. The songs take place once again in a world where nothing is quite what it seems. They also take place in a world wracked by violence, where corruption is hard to escape and doom looms on the horizon.

These two worlds surface in the opening track, 'Jokerman,' a possibly autobiographical song that favorably recalls the misty-morning feel of 'Mr Tambourine Man.' The jokerman is a poet/fool residing in an idyllic place, "half asleep 'neath the stars with a small dog licking your face." The jokerman is also on a spiritual quest, but the more he searches the worse things seem to get. The natural versus the man-made contrast as the jokerman bounces between the two. One minute he is peacefully contemplating a river, the next he is on a street where war threatens to erupt from behind every curtain.

'Sweetheart Like You' recalls both *Blonde on Blonde* and *Blonde on the Tracks* in passion and mood. The sense of humor missing on Dylan's last several albums is resurrected here. It sneaks up on you like the surprise ending of the song which leaves a question as to just what the "dump like this" where the song takes place is. Dylan is at his best here, acting each

line as he sings it. There's a video of this song and it should be interesting to see how he allows it to be interpreted.

'Neighbourhood Bully' is the cut receiving the most airplay probably because it rocks so hard recalling the fury of *Highway 61 Revisted*. It quickly becomes obvious that it isn't about a neighbourhood bully at all, but a startlingly intense portrait of Israel and the Israeli situation, with just enough reminders of Jewish history to start the listener thinking. It certainly lends credence to the recent rumors of Dylan's return to his Jewish roots.

This surprising statement from a man who began the decade singing only the praises of Jesus Christ is followed by 'License to Kill,' a sad testament to man's ability to destroy himself.

"Man thinks 'cause he rules the earth/He can do with it as he please. And if things don't change soon. He will." Dylan starts out. The image of "the woman on my block who just sits there" is bone-chilling. It all brings back memories of that feeling that a song could actually change things if only enough people would hear it.

'Man of Peace' and 'Union Sundown' start side two, which turns suddenly political and topical. "I hear that sometimes Satan comes as a man of peace," Dylan warns, as images of a certain president come to mind. However, the man of peace (or Satan) could be anyone.

He could be standing next to you

The person that you notice least

The humor surfaces again only to be cornered by devastatingly scary ideas.

You wanna get married do it now

Tomorrow all activity will cease

'Union Sundown,' which will probably be construed by people who don't listen to it carefully as anti-union when it's really anti-greed, has this same sarcastic humor leading up to a grim ending.

I can see the day coming when even your home garden will be against the law

Playwright/actor sam Shepard once wrote of Dylan. "He movies into mysticism at the drop of an E minor chord." With 'I And I,' Dylan shifts gears once again into the dream world that's the real world. This song alone could fill an entire review, with an eerie timeless quality, rich in poetic texture.

As the story weaves from a man watching the strange women sleeping in his bed to his walk in the hight, in which he converses with her, we soon see that no one else is writing songs on this level.

Almost a companion piece to 'Jokerman' - because there's so much going on, on a lot of different levels - it sets the listener up for the album's end. Everything that Dylan has done in the past seems to come together in this one song to create something new, again with traces of subtle humor.

Dylanb closes his best album in nine years with 'Don't Fall Apart On Me Tonight,' a semi-humorous affirmation of need. Returning from some heavy excursion into politics and religion, the singer finds himself in dire need of the very woman who's about the leave, a situation Bob Dylan has sung about during his entire career. In a style somewhere between *Blonde on Blonde* and *Nashville Skyline* he deadpans his way through creating an effectively Chaplinesque high-wire balance between comedy and seriousness. Just when you think he's about to get heavy, he hits you with a laugh.

The nearest place open is 1,000 miles away

And I can't take you there

Of course, you never find out if she stats, but he argues a good case.

You were so fine Clarke Gable would've fell at your feet. And laid his life on the line.

Infidels shows that Bob Dylan can be both entertaining and meaningful in a way rarely heard these days. Some lines and ideas in this record are destined to be controversial - they'll be mentioned, distorted and out of context a year from now in the 'People' column and then repeated the next night on the 'Celebrity' segment of the local evening news. The

controversial part is unimportant. What is important is that Dylan is once again writing songs that make you think and ask questions.

Real Live

Bob Dylan's new album, *Real Live*, is the first legitimately released live Dylan album to capture the power, the essence of his concerts. His three previous live efforts, *Before the Flood*, *Hard Rain* and *At Budokan*, while having special moments just didn't have the feel of a Dylan concert. Until now, the best live Dylan on record could be found on *The Concert for Bangladesh* and *The Last Waltz*.

Before the Flood is great because of the intense dynamics of The Band. Dylan's vocals on that chronicle of his return to the stage after an eight year absence are harsh and strained as he shouts the words to his classics with lots of energy but little meaning.

It wasn't until the following year that Dylan recaptured his performing magic with the Rolling Thunder Revue. However, Columbia released *Hard Rain*, recorded at the end of the Southern part of the tour when things had considerably deteriorated.

The *Budokan* record was released in this country only when the Japanese imported started selling and Columbia released it was missing out on a good thing. This record contained radically reworked arrangements of Dylan's best songs, rendering many unrecognisable. Many rock critics howled bitterly.

On *Real Live*, the arrangements aren't quite so drastically altered and certain tart rock critics who evidently listen to the records they're supposed to review while taking a shower are now smartly complaining that things aren't changed enough. This is hardly the point.

Real Live is just what its title indicates: over 50 minutes of live music performed by real people without gimmicks or machines. It also represents a renewed commitment to rock and roll by Dylan. Performing with a small five-piece band instead of the large ensembles he's used in recent tours, he sticks to basics, allowing the songs to speak for themselves unencumbered by elaborate arrangements excessive percussion or the back-up vocalists he's insisted on using since 1978.

Perhaps this is when he is at his best - just one man and a guitar communicating directly with the audience.

The band, consisting of all British musicians, is dominated by the soaring guitar of ex-Rolling Stone Mick Taylor, who appeared on Dylan's last album, *Infidels*. Dylan gives Taylor ample room to display his stunning virtuosity with several extended solos. I only wish keyboardist Ian McLagen had stepped out equally.

But the main attraction is Dylan, and he provides a unique selection of songs from *Freewheelin'* through *Infidels*. Hardly a greatest-hits album, but Dylan has carefully chosen, for once, the best moments from his concerts. The choices reflect some of his strongest social commentary including 'Tombstone Blues', 'License to Kill' and 'Masters of War.' Since he is virtually incapable of doing a song the same way twice (and I've heard enough tapes to prove it) all the versions here are new.

'Masters of War,' for instance, rocks ferociously enough to be considered for the WMMR or WYSP playlists, though I have yet to hear anything from this record on so-called rock radio. On the radio, this song might reach some of the kids - those who ask Anita whether they should join the Marines before or after the Def Leppard concert - in a way the acoustic version from 1963's *Freewheelin'* never could.

'Tangled up in Blue' is almost completely different lyrically and melodically, though it is just as riveting as the original from *Blood on the Tracks*. This track features Dylan alone on guitar and harmonica. Perhaps this is when he is at his best - just one man and a guitar communicating directly with the audience.

The incredible response to the solo numbers (which also include a sing-song 'It Ain't Me Babe' and 'Girl from the North Country' that could be aired on any folk program) is overwhelming compared to the applause on the rocker which is never less than a roar.

My only complain with this record, other than Columbia's promotional sticker claiming eight of the ten songs to be "Never Before Recorded Live" (the number is actually six), is that a couple of selections could have been different. 'Ballad of a Thin Man' and 'Maggies Farm' have already appeared twice on other live Dylan albums, though the other two versions of 'Maggie' were among the most ridiculous Dylan ever attempted.

On his European tour last summer when this record was recorded, Dylan resurrected many songs he hadn't performed in close to 20 years, such as 'Tombstone Blues,' which is included and 'Leopard Skin Pill Box Hat,' which isn't. Maybe Columbia has a second volume waiting in the wings. Until then, *Real Live* is the real thing.

Empire Burlesque

On *Empire Burlesque* Bob Dylan confronts the '80s and his critics by using a lot more recording studio technique than he usually bothers with. Notorious for recording live and preferably with three or less takes, he has finally made an album where the arrangements were carefully thought out.

Producing himself, Dylan hired studio wizard Arthur Baker to remix the tracks. Baker does an admirably restrained job adding his famous touches of bells, drum machines and horns with taste and an obvious respect for Dylan.

The result is the most produced Dylan album in history, though the material is pretty much what he's been doing for the last 22 years. The album is evenly divided between hardcore blues based rockers and very pretty soul-tinged ballads. Whether these new songs represent any artistic growth is debatable, but the performance and execution are uniformly excellent. If this record doesn't receive a lot of airplay, something is really wrong, for it contains several potential hits.

"Tight Connection to My Heart" is the opening cut. Also released as a single and a video, it's a medium-paced rock song with wild "Blonde on Blonde" type imagery and a great Mick Taylor guitar solo. It's followed by the deceptively simple "Seeing The Real You At Last," a nasty, sarcastic rocker with a stinging horn section.

The first of several ballads, "I'll Remember You," is a duet with Madelyn Quebec, who has worked with Dylan several times in the past. Though there could be a little less echo on the vocals, the song is among the most tender Dylan has written and his piano work here, as well as on "Emotionally Yours," is quite appealing.

"Clean Cut Kid," previously recorded by the Textones, featured Rolling Stone Ron Wood on an explosive Chuck Berryish guitar propelled by the drumming of Anton Fig and the background soul chorus of Carol Dennis, Queen Esther Marrow and Peggy Blu. This is the closest Dylan has come to humor in a long time - until you read the lyrics (provided for the first time) and realise the song could be about a Vietnam veteran.

"Trust Yourself" is very close in arrangement and melody to "Gotta Serve Somebody," though the message is a bit different. In this potential hit, Dylan seems to be addressing his fans directly.

"Don't trust me to show you the truth, when truth may only be ashes and dust"

“When the Night Comes Falling from the Sky” is the biggest surprise. With layers of synthesisers and percussion, this could be played in a disco. At the same time, it is a Western style ballad reminiscent of “All Along The Watchtower” and “Isis” with incredibly beefed up sound.

On this standout rocker of the album, lyrically, emotionally and musically, Dylan really wails the vocals. It builds for seven minutes with each verse getting scarier and more intense. There is no doubt in my mind, though, that it would’ve been just as great without the extra effects.

“Something’s Burning Baby,” with its heavy handed marching drum intro, gels better with each listen. The story is typically mysterious, but creates a dramatic tension only Dylan is capable of generating.

Saving the best for last, “Dark Eyes” is a solo number with acoustic guitar and harmonica. Singing in a voice that could be on *The Times They Are A-Changin’* album, he achieves one of the most beautiful and poetic songs of his career. Gentle fingerpicking the guitar and carefully blowing into the harp, he creates a feeling that the studio tricks and synthesisers just can’t touch. The song, a poem on his current state of mind, is set to a melody that seems hundreds of years old,

They tell me to be discreet for intended purposes

They tell me revenge is sweet and from where they stand I’m sure it is.

But I feel nothing for their game where beauty goes unrecognised

All I feel is heat and flame and all I see are dark eyes

Placed last, it’s a statement in itself that though Dylan can make a great modern-sounding record, if you want something real, his voice and guitar are all that’s necessary. I understand why Dylan made this record, but I’ll take “Dark Eyes – and anything else he comes up with like it over the rest of this album any day.

Biograph – rediscovered Dylan

After a delay of more than a year Columbia has finally released *Biograph*, a five-record box set retrospective of Bob Dylan’s career from 1962 through 1981. Though this include most of Dylan’s hits, it is not a greatest hits package. it is an extremely well done, carefully thought out representation of Dylan’s work with a 36 page booklet in which a lot (for

once) is actually revealed. Each record's liner sleeve has a song-by-song description in which Dylan talks about the inspiration and motivation behind the songs.

Fifty-three songs are included with 18 never before available (legally) and three available only on 45s. All of Dylan's studio albums from those years are represented (with the exception of *Self Portrait*, including no more than three songs from any one album).

The previously unreleased tracks are obviously the main attraction to fans, along with the booklet, which includes many rare photos and information never before printed, such as the fact that Dylan's father was a polio victim. Of the unreleased tracks, most have not been available even on bootlegs and different versions of the bootlegged songs are on this set, with the exception of "I'll Keep It with Mine."

That song and "Percy's Song" both covered by Fairport Convention, are two for the first time, legitimately. The two are classic and moving performances that rate with the best of Dylan's work.

Three live songs from 1966 are included, "I Don't Believe You," done with the Hawks (later The Band) and two solos, "Visions of Joanna" and a particularly beautiful "It's All Over Now Baby Blue" with the great almost psychedelic harp solos Dylan played live during that period but could never capture in the recording studio.

There's also a bunch of songs that simply never made it onto albums. From the *Freewheelin'* session, the wild, "Baby I'm in the Mood for You" has the spirit of Dylan's first album. "Up to Me," recorded by Roger McGuinn, is from the *Blood on the Tracks* sessions and equal in intensity to the best of that album. From *Desire* there's "Abandoned Love," and "Caribbean Wind" from the *Shot of Love* sessions.

Each side is put together by feel or theme, rather than chronologically or historically. The album keeps bouncing back and forth through the years. The first side is basically love songs, opening with "Lay Lady Lay" (almost as if to get it out of the way). In the notes, Dylan reveals that he never felt close to the song and begged Clive Davis (then head of Columbia) not to release it as a single. It's followed by "Baby Let Me Follow You Down," the one song on the set that Dylan didn't write, but a favorite from his first record that every guitar player in Washington Square had to know.

The second side is Dylan's early "protest" material, including "Blowin' in the Wind" and 'The Times They Are A-Changin' " and ending with "Percy's Song," a ballad about a personal victim of injustice.

Side three is the heavy rocking side starting off with Dylan's first electric single, "Mixed Up Confusion," from 1962, a slightly different take from the original single, which rocks a little harder. Side four has no underlying theme but includes three unreleased songs, one of which, "Lay Down Your Weary Tune," is an early treasure that the Byrds recorded. It closes with "Every Grain of Sand," one of Dylan's most poetic and beautiful songs, from the underrated *Shot of Love* album.

The remaining side continues in this fashion – not exactly defined – but it all works. Other songs finally available include "Quinn the Eskimo," mysteriously absent from *The Basement Tapes* in a version not on bootlegs. "You're A Big Girl Now" is the version from the original *Blood on the Tracks* sessions, as opposed to the one that appears on that album. It's too bad they didn't do the same with "Tangled up in Blue," which is by far a superior version to the one released.

A couple of other tracks could have been used to further enhance this set, such as *The Basement Tapes* version of "I Shall Be Released," instead of the casual version they included from *Greatest Hits, Vol. 2*. But for each song here, there could've been another one which points out Dylan's achievement. This set could've been ten records and there would still be great songs not on it.

From a historical point of view, the one song that should be on the set that's missing is "A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall," which, 23 years after it was written seems more powerful than ever.

Biograph is a set record collectors will want. Hard-core Dylan fans who weren't going to buy it changed their minds once they saw it and heard it. For those who aren't fans or collectors but might have wondered what Dylan's about, this set (and it's reasonably priced) will definitely serve as an appropriate introduction.

The opening page of the booklet says it best. It describes a costume party in Australia where everyone was requested to dress as a character from a Dylan song. At the party was a diplomat who carried on his shoulder a Siamese cat, Louis the King, Einstein disguised as Robin Hood, the Queen of Spades, Napoleon in Rags, Tambourine Man and a Preacher with 20

pounds of headlines stapled to his chest. What other songwriter could have that written about him?

Dylan and Petty – Knocked Out Loaded

The Bob Dylan/Tom Petty concert at the Spectrum was a three-hour affair with no intermission that found Dylan concentrating on newer material and cover songs rather than the classics that made him famous.

Dylan was in fine form – animated, energetic and obviously having a good time, drinking beer and lighting an endless series of cigarettes. On this tour, he seems happy to simply rock out and play with a good band rather than reach the mystic edge of intensity that he is capable of.

Opening with the old gospel rock song, “Shake a Hand,” he moved into a slow, moody “All Along the Watchtower,” followed by “Clean Cut Kid” and “I’ll Remember You,” from *Empire Burlesque*. A fairly nasty “Shot of Love,” with Mike Campbell on slide guitar, preceded an all-right reading of the Waylon Jennings standard, “We Had It All” (written by country writers Troy Seals and Donnie Fritts.)

Dylan closed out the first quarter with a rocked up “Masters of War,” then introduced Petty and the Heartbreakers, who did four of their radio hits, including “Listen to Your Heart” and “Breakdown.” Having seen Petty do the same exact songs with the same exact stage moves in New York, I adjourned to the lobby for a smoke and a coke.

After Petty and band left came the best performance of the night – Dylan’s solo acoustic set. Unfortunately, Dylan did only three solo songs. At Saturday’s show, he did “The Times They Are a-Changin’,” a great “One Too Many Mornings” and “It Ain’t Me Babe.” Petty joined Dylan for a fun version of the country-western “I Forgot More Than You’ll Ever Know.”

The acoustic part out of the way, Dylan, Petty and the Heartbreakers resumed rocking with their collaborative single, “Band of the Hand,” along with another *Empire Burlesque* song, “When the Night Comes Falling,”

and another cover, Rick Nelson's "Lonesome Town." Next was "Ballad of a Thin Man," which hasn't been great since Dylan stopped playing piano on it, then he again left the stage to Petty, who did more radio hits, mysteriously leaving out his last big one, "Rebel."

Dylan opened the final segment with "Rainy Day Women," which was fun, but so what? The crowd loved it, but he's got at least a hundred better songs that he could've done. This was redeemed by an initially unrecognisable but sensitive rendering of "I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine."

He turned in another surprise cover, Ry Cooder's beautiful "Just Across the Borderline," before finishing up with "Like a Rolling Stone" and "In the Garden." On "Rolling Stone," Dylan really got into it, spitting out the rephrased verses with fiery passion.

All the musicians on this tour appeared to be having a great time, including the backup singers, the Queens of Rhythm. (Carolyn Dennis was missing from Saturday's show.) The Heartbreakers provided Dylan with adequate if not spectacular backing – they don't come anywhere near approaching the intensity of The Band. They do manage, however, to stay out of Dylan's way and not clutter up the sound or play inappropriate licks like some of Dylan's past backup bands.

Dylan and Petty's duets are a lot of fun and it's nice to see the usually dour Dylan smiling and having a good time. I prefer it when he takes it to the edge (which he only does occasionally on this tour), and I really wish he'd do more solo stuff, because that's when he gets to the heart of the matter

* * *

Dylan's new record, *Knocked Out Loaded*, is another matter entirely. Why he chose to release this mishmash of various unconnected sessions at this time is a mystery. Once again, using the gigantic overblown sound of *Empire Burlesque*, this album contains three cover songs, three collaborations and a couple of throw-away originals.

The only song of any real interest is the half-spoken, half-sung collaboration with playwright Sam Shepard, "Brownsville Girl," which finds Dylan standing in line to see a movie starring Gregory Peck. The song

becomes a movie and you're not really sure what's going on as it builds into a long dramatic story that is the equal of "Lily Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts" and "Black Diamond Bay." With a chorus that dates to Woody Guthrie and a gospel choir humming in the background, Dylan unwinds this tale in his best sly style.

The only other song that conveys a mood is the last cut, "Under Your Spell," written with Carole Bayer Sager and probably produced by Dave Stewart, who plays guitar. Dylan and Stewart are supposed to have done a whole album together and if this cut is any indication it could've been quite promising.

The reggae version of the country gospel song, "Precious Memories," has a way of growing on you, and T. Bone Burnett plays funky guitar on the opener, Junior Parker's "You Wanna Ramble." Despite occasional good playing and all-right singing, this is one of Dylan's worst records. The cover painting is good, but the songs just don't make it. This one is for the hardcore Dylan fans.

Dylan: Down, not grooving

Bob Dylan has released his first album in two years, the appropriately titled *Down in the Groove*, which was delayed and changed innumerable times. Perhaps the shortest of his career, clocking in at a little over 31 minutes, it shows that Dylan is hell-bent on being rock's greatest eccentric.

A couple of things are immediately apparent: First, Dylan could care less about selling record. Rumors had been circulating for months that CBS did not want to put this album out.

Second, Dylan has apparently stopped writing. The album consists primarily of covers, and the few originals are basically throwaways compared with what he is capable of writing. This lull in creativity matches his dry spell of the early 70s, when he recorded such unremarkable albums as *Self-Portrait*. The main difference is that this time Dylan has continued to perform live.

Like his last album, *Knocked out Loaded*, this one lists no producer and is a hodgepodge of tracks from various sessions. For the first time ever (except for *Biograph*, the five record retrospective), Dylan has included a

track originally scheduled for an earlier album. "Death Is Not The the End," definitely the best original on the record, was initially recorded for *Infidels*.

Probably at the behest of Columbia Records, the song was included, with the backing vocals of Full Force added to the original track. In the context of this record, it isn't as strong as it could be. When hear in the contest of the other songs left off *Infidels* (which could easily have been a two-record set). It has more of an effect. Then again, I've been listening to it for over a year, so I'm used to it.

There is something perversely likeable about *Down in the Groove*. The music goes from rock to folk in that order, and the rock does rock in Dylan's typical earthy blues influenced style.

The album starts off with Wilbert Harrison's "Let's Stick Together," with Dylan leading a tight four-piece band, including Danny Kortchmar on guitar, Steve Jordan on drums and Randy Jackson on bass.

"When Did You Leave Heaven?" is a nice - if somewhat drippy - ballad with just guitar, keyboards and drums. "Sally Sue Brown" gets back to an early R&B groove and is notable for the back up vocals of Bobby King and Willie Green who usually sing with Ry Cooder.

"Death is Not the End" is a beautiful song with a countryish melody and subtle backing by Mark Knopfler on guitar, Robbie Shakespeare on bass, Sly Dunbar on drums and Alan Clarke on keyboards. In all seriousness, it would be a great song to play for someone contemplating suicide.

"Had a Dream About You Baby," from the soundtrack of Dylan's ill-fated movie, *Hearts of Fire*, brings the first side to a rocking conclusion. It's not a great song, but it kicks ass and included Eric Clapton on guitar, Ron Wood on bass and Mitchell Froom on keyboards.

Side two starts with two songs co-written with Grateful Dead lyricist Robert Hunter: "Ugliest Girl in the World," a stupid slightly funny rocker with great harp and the more interesting "Silvio," which has been getting some airplay.

"Silvio," which has a way of growing on you, is the most provocative song on the record, with an insistent beat and a great chorus. Along with "Death," it approaches the intensity one would hope to hear from Dylan.

“90 Miles an Hour Down a Dead End Street” is an old Hank Snow hit. ON the original version, Snow started in a slow blues groove that accelerated to a fairly rollicking pace. Dylan does it slow, almost like a hymn, carefully accentuating the words.

He moves back to folk music to close his weirdest record ever. On “Shenandoah,” he gets an ’80s approximation of his Nashville Skyline voice. He sets up an acoustic Bo Diddley sort of rhythm, accented by a subtle electric guitar and a strumming mandolin punctuated by a typically whacky harmonica solo. Instead of stretching out the “look away” chorus he clips it short.

Saving the best for last, he ends with a great song by the bluegrass group the Stanley Brothers’ “Rank Strangers,” one of the great eerie classic of American folk music. Dylan does it playing a softly strumming halting rhythm on acoustic, with Larry Klein playing spooky sliding notes on the bass.

This track shows that Dylan can still really sing when he wants to. If the whole record had the power of this cut it would have been incredible. Dylan has a way of singing old folk songs in which his voice cuts right through, giving the song a feeling of mystery and timelessness.

Down in the Groove, however, will only appeal to the most hardcore Dylan fans. Much like the numerous covers he did when he toured with Tom Petty. It’s just an album of songs (I guess) he felt like singing, with nothing of startling insight or significance, just music – more or less.

Probably to the chagrin of Columbia executives Dylan is deliberately ignoring all current musical trends and recording production values, doing his best not to have a hit record. For that alone, it is laudable.

There are two other interesting things about this album. One is the sticker on the cover which says, “1988 Inductee Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.’ The other is an address on the inner sleeve to write away for information on Dylan tours and records. I guess he or his management feels that anyone who writes, after hearing this record, is a real fan.

Oh Mercy - Dylan's triumph

Oh Mercy, the first Bob Dylan album comprised entirely of new, original material since 1985's *Empire Burlesque*, is much more than a return to form. It's dark, moody, emotionally stark and questioning and possibly Dylan's best work since *Blood on the Tracks*.

Part of the reason is that in Daniel Lanois, Dylan may finally have found a producer who understands his work and knows how to capture it in the modern studio context without compromising the music.

Lanois understands that mystery is one of the key ingredients of Dylan's magic and conveys that mystery throughout the record with a spooky ambiance, from the way the harp is recorded on 'What Was It You Wanted?' through such cuts as 'Shooting Star' and – most noticeably – 'The Man in the Long Black Coat.'

The last is a narrative, timeless ballad which uses the scenes and the setting of a dance hall – and the woman leaving with the mysterious and probably demonic man – as a framework to impart other ideas dealing with life, death and conscience.

Lanois has also surrounded Dylan with an able and sympathetic cast of New Orleans musicians including members of the Neville Brothers band and guitarist Mason Ruffner who provide subtle, understated yet funky accompaniment reminiscent of such albums as *Slow Train Coming* and *New Morning* without sounding like either of them.

Most of all, Oh Mercy reminds me of *Blonde on Blonde* because of the spontaneous interaction of the musicians, who construct a cohesive flowing backdrop for the songs while playing all kinds of wild things on their individual instruments. The other things the album has in common with *Blonde on Blonde*: On that record, Dylan recorded in Nashville and came out with something that in no way resembled that city's sound; he does the same thing here with New Orleans. The music is distinctly Bob Dylan music.

The heart of any Dylan album is the songs and how he sings them. The good news is that, for the first time in years, he sounds truly committed to the songs. The edge is there that makes him stand out above practically everybody else so that certain lines or turns of phrase cut right through you.

When he sings "Is it really important?" on 'What Was It You Wanted?' you wouldn't want to be in the same room with him. Many of the songs are chanted in a husky whisper, while the hymn-like 'Ring Them Bells' (almost a re-write of 'Chimes of Freedom') is sung in the rich emotive voice he used on *The Basement Tapes* 'Tears of Rage' and 'I Shall Be Released.'

In Dylan songs, what's not said is sometimes as important as what is, and the way a line is sung often exerts far greater impact than the line itself.

On 'Most of the Time' – one of the most revealing songs of his career – he runs down a long list of personal self-assurance, denying that he's thinking about whoever has gone out of his life. But the catch of the title phrase lets you know that the rest of the time it's killing him. The song opens casually, building slowly in tension and impact. When he sings, "I can smile in the face of mankind," the emotion behind it bursts with rage and disdain.

'What Good Am I?' is another self-probing song that questions Dylan's isolation and alienation in a manner that works on many levels, while on 'What Was It You Wanted?' (perhaps his grouchiest songs ever), the finger is pointed outward, perhaps toward the audience that still looks to him for answers.

"Did somebody tell you you could get it from me?" he snarls. This song contains (in a wicked way) one of the album's few traces of humor. The only other songs that come close to humor are 'Everything is Broken' – a rocking casualty list – and 'Disease of Conceit', some of whose sly vocal inflections may provoke a smile.

Each song stands on its own merits, from the charged openers, 'Political World' – a contemporary song crammed with quotable lines – to the lovely, wistful closer, 'Shooting Star,' where he uses another variant on the 'Girl From The North Country' melody.

Here Dylan employs his favorite writing device of using one line to get to the key idea behind the song. This time the line is, 'guess it's too late to say the things to you that you needed to hear me say.' It's not too late, because *Oh Mercy* is a real Bob Dylan album, and it's right on time.

The Grandfather Dylan And The World Gone Mad

Leave it to Bob Dylan to follow up his most successful record in years – last year's *Oh Mercy* – with something that's almost the exact opposite, the just-released *Under the Red Sky*.

The last record was a subtle, carefully-arranged and produced collection of thought-out songs; the new record is a rocking kick-out-the-jams collection of mostly blues, with a star studded backing team.

Produced by Don and Dave Was and Jack Frost, the album is the closest Dylan has come to recreating what he termed the 'wild mercury sound' of *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde*. The music sounds like it was recorded live in one take, with the kind of spontaneous interaction between musicians that can only be achieved in a live setting.

Likewise, many of the lyrics seem equally spontaneous, as if Dylan was making them up as he sang, especially on the bluesier tracks. (Reportedly he wrote many of the songs in the studio – just like on *Blonde on Blonde* – thought the opener, 'Wiggle, Wiggle,' was performed in concert earlier this year.)

Initially, many of the tracks have a lyric simplicity – close to nursery rhymes – that's somewhat disarming. (Dylan did become a grandfather in the past year.)

The title track, which offers a beautiful melody and exquisite slide guitar solos by George Harrison, resembles a children's story with its images of "the boy and girl baking in a pie." 'Two By Two' sounds like a children's camp song. But once you *listen* to the record as a whole, you realize that every innocent image is contrasted with unspeakable evil and a world and country gone totally mad, bent on self-destruction, where fear and greed are supreme rulers and God the only salvation.

Good – or more accurately, innocence – versus evil is constantly hammered over pounding drums, raw whining slide guitars and cascading organs, while Dylan – his voice craggier and hoarser than ever – nonchalantly tosses off-the-cuff lyrics, alternately ranting and crooning.

The album starts with 'Wiggle Wiggle,' a ferocious rocker with Guns 'n' Roses' Slash and David Lindley on guitar; it's the closest Dylan has ever come to writing a dance tune. 'Under the Red Sky' resurrects the classic Dylan guitar/piano/organ sound, with *Highway 61/Blonde on Blonde* keyboardist AL Kooper back on board. It's a simple story of a boy and a girl and a man on the moon, with a haunting melody and an implied threat. It's easy to imagine Dylan singing it to kids.

'Unbelievable' is a hard-rocking state-of-the-country-and-world song, with a guitar intro straight out of Carl Perkins. 'Born in Time' – the only love song – has a hard to pin down melody. With Dylan on accordion, it's sung in a low, rough whisper. David Crosby provides subtle harmony, and Bruce Hornsby plays majestic piano.

'TV Talkin' Song' recalls any number of the talkin' blues Dylan did at the beginning of his career and such crazed tunes as '115th Dream.' Over Hornsby's rollicking piano, he sees one of the speakers in London's Hyde Park delivering a diatribe against TV while all kinds of pandemonium breaks out. Ironically, it would make a great video.

'10,000 Men' is a blues with Dylan on piano and Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jimmy Vaughan and David Lindley on guitar. They do a great job of getting the wild sound of Howlin' Wolf's band, Dylan providing a low, spooky vocal. The song has the same suspicious paranoia of Wolf's best work, but surprisingly ends with Dylan thanking a love for being so nice to him.

'Two by Two' is another children's song, with Dylan going from one to ten numerically, like '12 Days of Christmas.' Implied are the political and social movements of the '60s, much the way they are in Jackson Browne's 'Before the Deluge,' but there's a lot of religious imagery as well. Elton John contributes a very funky electric piano solo.

'God Knows' is another rocker, with great lead guitar from Stevie Ray Vaughan and slide from David Lindley, with Dylan on piano. Dylan runs down a long list of 'God Knows' while he does his usual trick of mixing up romance, social commentary and religion.

'Handy Dandy' again resurrects the *Highway 61* sound. Over a combination 'Louie Louie'/'Hang On Sloopy' (aka 'Like a Rolling Stone') riff, the lyrics could well be autobiographical: "Handy Dandy/Controversy surrounds him/Been around the world and back again/Something in the moonlight still hounds him." Waddy Wachtel does a great Robbie Robertson on guitar.

The album closes with 'Cats in the well,' which combines blues with childlike images; it's a song that again manages to recall Howlin' Wolf. Like the album, as the song proceeds the images grow scarier, starting with 'Cat's in the well/Wolf is lookin' in' to 'Cats in the well/Grief is showin' its face/The World's been slaughtered/It's such a bloody disgrace,' culminating in 'May the Lord have mercy on us all.'

One thing for sure about *Under the Red Sky* – in his 50th year, Bob Dylan is hell-bent on rocking out.

The Bodacious Great New Dylan Collection

With 58 previously unreleased tracks filling three CDs to capacity, one would think the new Bob Dylan box set, *The Bootleg Series, Volumes 1 -3* (Columbia), would close the gaps in his catalogue. But it's only the beginning.

For more than two decades, an international underground network of Dylan fans has bought, sought and traded bootleg Dylan tapes and records.. To their fascination and frustration, these collectors discovered long ago that these tapes – culled from alternates and outtakes, publishing demos, live performances and rehearsals (while of dubious sound quality) – often turns out to be as good as and sometimes better than the official releases.

This collection is chronologically arranged, spanning 1961 to '89; half the songs were recorded before Dylan went electric in 1965. Still, the set touches on almost every phase of his career.

Some critics are questioning the motives behind this release, but it goes a long way toward getting some of Dylan's greatest songs and performances out, with sound quality that isn't tenth generation. In fact, the sound throughout is high quality.

Dylan's '60s concerts served as vehicles to try new songs, and you waited for the next album to hear them again (the opposite of the music scene today, when concerts often function as advertisements for an act's latest record).

Many of the songs here were staples of those shows, such as the anti-boxing 'Who Killed Davey Moore?' 'Walls of Redwing' and 'Talkin' John Birch Paranoid Blues,' which lampoons the extremist organization that carried McCarthyism into the '60s. Dylan walked off the Ed Sullivan Show when they wouldn't let him sing it; then Columbia (fearing a lawsuit) deleted the same song from *Freewheelin'* 'Let Me Die in My Footsteps' also deleted from that album in favour of 'Hard Rain,' was an eloquent response to the bomb-shelter craze of the early '60s, revealing Woody Guthrie's influence more than any other Dylan song with lines like, "Let me drink from the waters where the mountain streams flood/Let the smell of wildflowers flow free through my blood."

The inclusion of several folk songs shows how this music shaped and defined Dylan's art. Two early original narrative ballads – the rollicking 'Rambling Gambling Willie' and the sombre 'Seven Curses' – deal with familiar Dylan moralistic themes: the outlaw as hero and the hypocrisy of justice.

These songs fit firmly into the folk tradition. Strangely, no Guthrie songs are included though his spirit dominates the three talking blues. Like Guthrie, Dylan often used traditional melodies for his songs.

Dylan's penchant for mixing musical genres started early. The Childe Ballad, 'House Carpenter,' is sung like a blues, while the reeling and rocking 'Quit Your Low Down Ways' – a reworking of Kokomo Arnold's 'Milk Cow Blues' – reflects Elvis Presley's influence.

Among the traditional songs, the haunting 'Moonshiner' is one of Dylan's greatest performances. Emotionally sung to soft finger-picked guitar, it gets into your soul and stands as the definitive example of how to sing a folk song.

The original 'Eternal Circles' is a song within a song about a performer watching a girl watching him, wanting to meet her but having to finish the song. The girl vanishes at its conclusion.

'Mama, You Been on My Mind' is both country and poetic, with cascades of words similar to 'Tambourine Man.' This version is slow, careful and sad, proving author Betsy Bowden's point (in her scholarly Dylan book, *Performed Literature*) that he defines a song by how he sings it, giving it different meanings at different times. In concert, he usually sang it in an exuberant buoyant fashion.

'Farewell Angelina,' recorded first by Baez, is presented here by Dylan for the first time. One of his most poetic songs, it shows the beginnings of the obscure, impressionistic imagery that would dominate his mid-'60s work. Written on several levels -as a farewell to a lover or a period in life, or as a subtle anti-war songs – the lyrics are not quite perfected. Still, it's one of the high points.

The rocks include "If You Gotta Go," a comical song containing Dylan's first use of sexual innuendo (it was a banned hit for Manfred Mann), 'Sitting on a Barbed Wire Fence' and an early, harder take of 'It Takes a Lot to Laugh.' The latter two are notable for the amazing guitar work of the late Mike Bloomfield, as well as the use of images and lines that turn up in other songs.

'She's Your Lover Now,' an incredible outtake from *Blonde on Blonde*, finds the singer confronting his ex-lover and her new one. He goes back and forth between the two, with lines such as, "Now you stand her expectin' me to remember somethin' you forgot to say," or to the boyfriend, "And you, you just sit around and ask for ashtrays; can't you reach?"

The band falters before the last verse (included in the notes), and the song collapses. A totally different solo version exists, with Dylan on piano, but it's not included.

Long overdue is the original 'I Shall Be Released,' with possessed vocals by Richard Manuel, who provides falsetto harmony, and Robbie Robertson's chime-like guitar. Also from the under-represented *Basement Tapes* is the surprising delight, 'Santa Fe', a nonsensical song with a terrific vocal.

The early '70s (Dylan's bleakest creative period) are best represented by 'Wallflower,' a country waltz previously on a Doug Sahm album with Dylan harmonizing. This version is superior, with a sly vocal.

From *Blood on the Tracks* are three alternate takes and one previously unknown song, 'Call Letter Blues,' which is musically identical to 'Meet Me in the Morning,' from the original New York sessions. (Dylan re-recorded half the songs, right before *Blood's* release, in Minnesota.) The complete original record displays a cohesiveness in sound and mood that the official version – powerful as it is – lacks.

The alternates of 'Tangled up in Blue,' 'Idiot Wind' and 'If You See Her, Say Hello' are not the familiar bootlegged ones, though they sound damn close. These takes are more understated than the album versions, slower and less frenzied. 'Idiot Wind,' with Dylan on guitar and harp and Tony Brown on bass, is less scathing, more forgiving and mournful.

The late-'70s 'Seven Days' is a wild rocker performed with the Rolling Thunder Revue. The early-'80s are marked by 'Every Grain of Sand,' one of Dylan's best songs, with poetry that recalls William Blake, in an unadorned version with Dylan on piano, Fred Tackett on guitar and Jennifer Warnes on harmony, recorded at home (a dog barks in the backgrounds).

Another standout from this period is 'Angelina,' a dark, mysterious ballad with startling imagery.

From *Infidels* (Dylan's most prolific period of the '80s) are five strong songs, including a major work, 'Blind Willie McTell,' with Dylan on piano and Mark Knopfler on guitar. Set to the tune of 'St James Infirmary,' it's a chilling masterpiece filled with images of the South and condemnation of a corrupt, greedy world.

'Someone's Got a Hold of My Heart' is an early, better version of 'Tight Connection' from *Empire Burlesque*. 'Tell Me' is a beautiful ballad with a slightly Mexican beat; 'Lord Protect My Child,' an astonishingly powerful prayer from a father for his son; 'Foot of Pride,' a disturbing funky rocker that could be about Dylan's disenchantment with the 'Born Again' movement.

'When the Night Comes Falling from the Sky' (From *Empire Burlesque*) appears in a radically different version. Backed by members of the E Street Band, it's in a major key; the other was discofied and over-produced, using the chords of 'All Along the Watchtower.'

The closer, 'Series of Dreams,' is an outtake from *Oh Mercy* that shows producer Daniel Lanois' penchant for overdoing it. Beneath the production is a moving, mysterious and personal song.

This massive collection should appeal to even the casual Dylan watcher. There are several unnecessary tracks, but the songs mentioned here are some of his best work.

More sets are planned. The next will feature live recordings, including the legendary 1966 Albert Hall Concert with the Band – some of the most explosive rock and roll in history.

I can easily think of 30 or 40 songs that could have been on this set. Here's hoping they too will soon be released.

Good As I Been To You

Nationally, traditional and acoustic music is making a major comeback. Since his "Never Ending Tour" began more than five years ago, Bob Dylan has made sure to include at least one traditional folk song in every show. His new *Good As I Been To You*, is comprised entirely of ballads, blues and folk songs, though it includes none of the songs he's performed regularly in concert.

The album makes it clear he's known these songs for years, and that – along with the fact that some are a few hundred years old – gives it a timeless feel, enhanced by the way it was recorded: live, in one take.

Dylan's guitar-playing throughout may surprise even his longtime fans. Always a driving rhythm guitarist, he now complements that rhythm with solid (if sometimes careless) but intricate picking, displaying a command over the instrument he's rarely revealed.

If the CDs had two sides (judging by the cassette version), both would lead off with variants of Leadbelly songs: "Frankie and Albert" (Leadbelly's version of "Frankie and Johnny") and "Step it Up and Go" (which Leadbelly recorded as "Bottle Up and Go").

There are a couple of standards: "Sitting on Top of the World" is done as a blues (as opposed to Doc Watson's country rendition); the cowboy song "Diamond Joe" and the bluegrass song "Little Maggie," though Dylan's stark rendition over an insistent guitar pattern is anything but bluegrass.

Most interesting are the ballads who characters engage in treachery, deceit and revenge. "Blackjack Davy" – is the story of a 16 year-year-old bride who leaves her rich husband and baby to go with the Gypsy. Unlike version by Pete Seeger and Arlo Guthrie, Dylan sings it in a minor key, basing it around a guitar riff similar to "The Cuckoo," in one of the most intense performances on the album.

In “Jim Jones,” a prisoner’s convict ship is overtaken by pirates, giving him hope for freedom. When the pirates are beaten back by soldiers he fantasises revenge.

“Canadee-I-O” is about a girl who bribes her sailor boyfriend to sneak her onto his ship, dressing her in sailors clothes. She gets discovered and the sailors want to throw her overboard, until the Captain intervenes and ends up marrying her.

“Arthur McBride” is an incredible Irish ballad about two cousins who go camping one Christmas morning and encounter a sergeant who tries to enlist them with a bribe. When they refuse, the sergeant threatens to cut off their heads, so they kill the sergeant and his companions, then ask him if he needs recruits. The story, rich in sarcasm, is told in the most polite language yet spares none of the gory details.

Dylan saves some of his best vocals for “You’re Gonna Quit Me,” a blues from which the album takes its title, and “Tomorrow Night,” which Elvis recorded for Sun.

A career on the road, playing some 100 shows a year for five years, has taken its toll on Dylan’s voice, which is craggier than ever and was targeted by reviewers of the recent Madison Square Garden tribute.

The funny thing is, reviewers in 1963 expressed exactly the same complaint voiced by critics today. Yes Dylan breathes life into these ancient ballads where other singers fail. Compare his version of Stephen Foster’s “Hard Times to Emmylou Harris’s. Hers is moving because it’s so pretty, but when Dylan sings “Is the song the sigh of the weary,” he sounds like he’s been singing it since time began. In “Jim Jones” he becomes the convict, and in “Arthur McBride,” the cousin who narrates.

Dylan’s previous album featured originals with lyrics that bore a strong resemblance to nursery rhymes. He closes this one with “Froggie Went A-Courtin’,” originally an Elizabethan political satire (Queen Elizabeth had a habit of naming her courtiers after animals) in a gentle, humorous performance that recalls Mississippi John Hurt. The point (if there is a point) of this album could be in the last line: “If you want any more, sing it yourself.”

This album (if the Dylan computer bulletin board network is any indication) has caused Dylan freaks to run to the library to look up the

origins of these tunes. If it makes people appreciate the vast wealth of traditional music from both sides of the Atlantic and how that music led to the popular music of today, it will more than have served its purpose.

Dylan's World Gone Wrong

A couple of years ago in an interview in *Song Talk*, a quarterly published by the National Academy of Songwriters, Bob Dylan said, "The world don't need any more songs." Judging by most of the new songs coming out on records these days, he's probably right.

In any case, he's apparently living up to his words. Aside from a song co-written with Willie Nelson in the past year, there's been no new songs from Dylan since 1990. His brand new album, *World Gone Wrong*, is yet another collection of old folk songs and blues, recorded live in the studio with Dylan accompanying himself on guitar and harp. At first, it seems bluesier than last year's similar effort, *Good As I Been to You*, but that feeling is deceptive there are only four actual "blues" songs. This time around, Dylan decided to give credit where credit is due by acknowledging his sources in some fairly wild liner notes, "About the Songs (what they're about)," which reveal that while he may not be creating any new songs, he can still write.

The notes read like a free-form poem, and Dylan slyly uses his vision of the songs to get across his feelings about society - the world gone wrong. The tone of the notes also indicates that somewhere in his brain the '65 Bob Dylan is still lurking around.

World Gone Wrong is more focused performance-wise than *Good As I Been To You*, both in Dylan's singing and guitar playing. What comes across is how much he likes - make that *loves* - these old songs, whether ancient ballads or blues. He believes in them and make them come alive, sounding at times (most notably on Blind Willie McTell's "Broke Down Engine") incredibly like he did on his first album, though older and wiser.

Among the more powerful tunes is the sorta blues murder ballad "Delia," which he has been performing in concert the past few years. Culled from several different versions, it's Dylan's strongest vocal on the album.

Equally strong is the ballad "Jack A-Roe" - about a woman who dresses as a man and sneaks on a battleship to find her lover. Joan Baez recorded this about this about three decades ago, but Dylan credits his version to the New Lost City Ramblers' Tom Paley. When Baez sang it, it was pretty and nice. Dylan drives the song with his guitar and his real low singing adds another, closer-to-spooky dimension.

Dylan pulls out his gentlest voice for “Lone Pilgrim,” a song he learned from a Doc Watson record. Also eerie, with an other-worldly quality. It is reminiscent of his own “Dark Eyes” from Empire Burlesque.

Also strong are the Mississippi Sheiks’ “Blood in My Eyes” and “World Gone Wrong,” Willie Brown’s “Ragged and Dirty,” and another battle ballad, “Two Soldiers.”

This album is no attempt to cash in on the so-called “unplugged” craze - it’s way beyond that. The point isn’t whether Dylan plays “Broke Down Engine” as well as Blind Willie McTell - actually he plays it completely differently - the point is the songs, Real songs, valid ones that have been around for years, which Dylan makes live again. In its own way, the album serves as a protest against the ridiculous absurdity of the music industry that churns out more crap at an ever-increasing rate, and what Dylan refers to in the notes as “...the insane world of entertainment.”

MTV Unplugged

When it comes to picking a Dylan album to listen to or a video to watch, MTV Unplugged is one of the last things I reach for. It’s probably the least listened to of all my (legitimate) Dylan albums. There’s some okay stuff on Unplugged though I certainly can’t remember what. The only time I ever put it on is when I’m arguing with someone about it. More than any other Dylan album (with the exception of 30th Anniversary) Unplugged seems like a product.

I can’t think of one performance, released or not — not even “Hazel” — that comes close to the most mundane song on any of the Supper Club shows. Frankly we’ll never know whether Dylan agrees or not, though I’m sure Columbia thought, especially given Clapton’s success that something with the “Unplugged” name would sell better. As has been documented hundreds of times, Dylan’s decisions on what to release or what not to release are at the very least perplexing. There could be some little thing either in the recording of or video of the Supper Club that he decided he didn’t like and that was why it was never released.

Dylan has himself alluded to being told what to do in commenting on this show and I think he felt he had to do it more than wanting to do it. The whole notion of Dylan unplugged is completely ridiculous since in some way he always had an acoustic part of his performance. The Supper Club was more real in that it just happened. He did what he wanted to do, not to mention there was none of the bullshit of putting younger members of the audience up front, which right there made it a more “real” experience.

The acoustic "Like A Rolling Stone" is just silly. Dylan could do a so-called "acoustic" "Dignity" or "Tombstone Blues" anytime he wants. The last time he really did Tombstone Blues right was in '65 with the Hawks. I like it when I see him do it, but in retrospect he hasn't touched the original in any of the live shows in the past 20 years. It just becomes another blues song for the most part.

"Knocking on Heavens Door" is an okay performance with a good harp solo, but the singing at times seems like he's trying too hard and Brendan O'Brien's hardly-unplugged organ is fairly generic. What the song lacks is the spookiness of the original studio take, a spookiness that was (sort of) captured in both the versions with The Band and when Larry Campbell and Charlie Sexton sang harmony in subsequent live versions. Without trying too hard, I could probably come up with a bunch of versions that are superior to the one on Unplugged.

The last time I heard him sing "Times They Are A Changin'" like he meant it was in '81, and he put a whole different spin on it, spooky and sad. I thought "With God On Our Side" was easily one of the best things about Unplugged along with "Dignity."

As far as I'm concerned the Supper Club shows remain one of the high points of the entire NET. Bob Dylan in a small club doing an all acoustic (with the exception of pedal steel) set that somehow in the space of exactly an hour captured his entire career and included songs from his latest album. And on top of that singing like he meant it, playing great harp and holding notes in a way that recalled a certain esteemed tour from almost 3 decades before and pulling out surprises like a great version of "Queen Jane". And not to mention other stellar performances such as "Delia," "Blood In My Eyes," "Ragged And Dirty," "I Want You," a superb "Jack-A-Roe" (which was amazing to watch), four terrific versions of "Ring Them Bells," and each has its own unique quality. They were far more intense and exciting than MTV Unplugged, which Dylan seemed to be doing because he had to do it whether he wanted to do it. He put far more emotion into the performances at the Supper Club than anything on MTV. In comparison the somewhat forced nature of MTV Unplugged doesn't come close.

Unplugged is ultimately a minor work that lacks both the intensity of Dylan in concert or his best albums.

Looking back on Time out of mind

In 1997, following a near-fatal illness, Bob Dylan received universal acclaim for Time Out Of Mind, a spooky bluesy album dealing with the topic of death among other things. Once again, it was his performance as much as the songs and his ability to make you feel that did it and the album went on to win three Grammys including album of the year.

Time Out of Mind is a blues album, built around riffs that come from Howlin' Wolf, with a couple of ballads. Dylan's music has always been steeped in the blues, right from his first album, and a large percentage of his music has always been blues or blues based. Most (but not all) of his "rock and roll" songs are structurally blues songs and of his studio albums (not counting Dylan) only Desire lacks a song that is blues in structure. The best songs on "Time out of Mind" are Trying To Get To Heaven, Not Dark Yet and Standing In The Doorway, followed by Cold Iron Bounds and Highlands and Lovesick, which along with the blues songs is better a lot of the time in concert.

Time out of Mind was the first Dylan album in centuries where he paid attention to what he wanted in the music as well as the production. Some have spoken about the production being in layers. Not true. Not if you really listen. The album was cut live. The musicians were not allowed to redo parts. It is obvious that each track was paid attention to in terms of sound, whether the raw roadhouse feel of "Dirt Road" or the more Chess-studio type sound of some of the other tracks. They really got what they were going after, both in music and in sound and while some of the songs have a "swamp" feel and a definite spooky quality, it doesn't have the buried, somewhat muddy sound of say Oh Mercy's "Political World." The only track where Dylan's voice is buried is "Cold Iron Bound" and I think deliberate as part of the sound of the track. It's going to be very interesting when the outtakes, which are supposed to be completely different, at least in terms of feel, finally surface.

I think the key to the title is the "Out of Mind" part. On every song (with the possible exception of "Make You Feel My Love," the only time Dylan comes up for air, he is clearly and plainly going out of his mind in blunt unapologetic terms. From the "walking", "standing" or trying to get somewhere it all sounds desperate. Most of the songs on Time out of Mind depict someone who can't wait to leave, from the light being bad to the room temperature. Something is continually making this person crazy, there's no solace.

This is a very powerful record and at its release I thought the best Dylan album since Blood on the Tracks. It was certainly the best album I'd heard in the '90s. There was hope on Blood on the Tracks, which appears to have been replaced by resignation on Time out of Mind, but unlike Blood on the Tracks, Dylan knew what he wanted and went for it and actually told the musicians what he wanted them to do. On Blood on the Tracks, Dylan just played the songs and all the musicians could do was follow.

There was a record my mother bought when I was a kid that's an Alan Lomax album with Peggy Seeger, Guy Carawan. This record was key when Time Out Of Mind came out when trying to figure out the sources of all the lines. Trying To Get To Heaven is almost entirely composed of lines from old folk songs and I got the 'Riding In A Buggy With Mary' Jane line, because Peggy Seeger sings the song on that album. But there's a bunch of other songs on this one album that

either Dylan has covered or used lines from. If I ever interview Dylan I would love to just say, "You ever see this record?"

One of the things I want to hear is the Jim Dickinson mix. My problem with Daniel Lanois is he is always making Daniel Lanois records no matter who the artist is. I suspect Dylan had more of a bluesy album in mind and there's little doubt in my mind that Lanois is why Dylan decided to produce himself. Hopefully the Dickinson mix includes the original Duke Robillard guitar parts, which Lanois replaced with his own guitar.

The good thing about Oh Mercy was that Daniel Lanois made Dylan work when he might not have been inclined to do so. With Time out of Mind, when you read about all the production technological bullshit he put songs through to obtain a kind of a Chess or Sun Records sound, Dylan achieved that sound, without all the bullshit, on "Love And Theft."

"Love And Theft"

"Some day everything's gonna be different
When I paint my masterpiece" --Bob Dylan, 1971

Last May, when it seemed like every newspaper and magazine in the world was remarking on how the rebel rock poet of the '60s had turned 60, Bob Dylan was in a recording studio in New York City with his road band, creating his most musically realized album. A pioneer and someone who prefers spontaneity and inspiration to perfection, Dylan albums—always recorded quickly—are for the most part rough and raw. If the feel is right, he'll leave in a mistake in the lyrics—a slurred line or even an out-of-tune guitar. Not this time. On Love And Theft, there is not one misplaced note, not one sloppy arrangement.

Much of the credit has to go to Dylan's excellent band: bassist Tony Garnier (who has worked with Dylan longer than any musician), drummer David Kemper, guitarist Charlie Sexton and multi-instrumentalist (various guitars, violin, banjo) Larry Campbell. For most of Dylan's career, the common perception has been, with good reason, that the greatest band that worked with Dylan was The Band. This album proves that—great as they were—the shadow of The Band is no longer there. This band, with the addition of Augie Meyers on organ, moves through every genre—whether straight-ahead rock and roll, blues, jump, swing or bluegrass—with ease. It's a magnificent achievement! The vision is clearly Dylan's, but the band more than puts it across. Perhaps more than any previous Dylan album, Love And Theft is as much about the music—and the sound and style of the music—as it is about the lyrics and the message.

At the same time, it is lyrically dense and loaded with references. It's been a very long time since the words have come pouring out of Dylan in such a torrent. In fact, as musical as this album is, there are few solos and, unlike his concerts, no instrumental jams. It's almost as if he wanted to make sure everything he wanted to say got in.

On the printed page, the lyrics can be deceptive—you have to hear them sung. And again, it is a new style of writing for Dylan. Some of the songs at first seem like jokes, but then he hits you with a line that sizzles like a wire on fire. You suddenly realize things are much darker and deeper than they seem, and you never know when that sizzling line is going to appear. There are more quotable lines on this album than any Dylan album in decades.

This is a distinctly American album, and it brings to mind such past work as *The Basement Tapes* and John Wesley Harding. Yet, there is a host of characters to rival *Highway 61 Revisited*. In contrast to the walking of *Time Out Of Mind*, on this album Dylan is constantly driving. Car references abound. And despite the limitations of his vocal range, Dylan sings with more intensity, emotion, heart and humor than he has on any album in a quarter of a century. It's as much in his phrasing and how he sings something as it is in what he's saying.

The album fades in on a rocker, "Tweedle Dee And Tweedle Dum," that is reminiscent of two songs from 1965/'66—"I Wanna Be Your Lover" and "Tell Me Mama." There are references in the song from the obvious "Alice In Wonderland" to the Bible and Robert Johnson, to name a few, and certain lines suspiciously recall the last presidential election.

"Mississippi" is a standout on an album of standouts. This is a new version of a song recorded for *Time Out Of Mind* and is one of the most beautiful and perfect arrangements of any Dylan song on any album. If there is any song on this album that sounds like a classic Bob Dylan song, this is it. From there, the album moves into the jump blues/swing of "Summer Days." One doesn't usually think of Bob Dylan as swinging, but this song swings like mad and is quite possibly the fastest song he's ever done. On the surface, it seems like a party song. But the lyrics slyly go deeper and sometimes comically, as in this line: "She says, 'You can't repeat the past,' I say 'You can't? What do you mean, you can't? Of course, you can.'" And again, the last election is quite possibly referenced with this verse where the last line brings to mind the second debate:

Politician's got on his joggin' shoes,

He must be runnin' for office, got no time to lose,

Suckin' the blood out of the genius of generosity.

You been a-rollin' your eyes, you been teasin' me.

Dylan downshifts into a more mellow kind of swing on "Bye and Bye," which one can almost imagine Sinatra or perhaps Tony Bennett singing. Dylan slips in such

lines as, "I'm sitting on my watch so I can be on time" and "The future for me is already a thing of the past"—with an apparent straight face—and then turns around and quotes William Blake. By the time he gets to the last verse, which includes the line "I'm gonna establish my rule through civil war," you're not so sure either of the above singers would have done it.

From there, Dylan goes into one of the heaviest and nastiest blues he's ever done, "Sad and Lonesome Day," with a wicked guitar riff punctuating each line. His vocal gets meaner and more ferocious with each verse building up to:

I'm going to spare the defeated, 'cause I'm going to speak to the crowd,

I'm going to teach peace to the conquered, I'm going to tame the proud.

Then suddenly, it's way back in time for one of the weirdest songs Dylan's ever done—"Floater (Too Much To Ask)"—that borrows a riff from a '30s jazz tune, "Snuggled On Your Shoulder," sung by Bing Crosby, among others. The setting appears to be somewhere in the South, with a lazy swinging feel, but all kinds of surprises lay in store from a sudden appearance of Romeo and Juliet to lines such as: "If you ever try to interfere with me/Or cross my path again, You do so at the peril of your own life."

From there, the sound suddenly shifts to bluegrass for "Highwater (For Charlie Patton)," another standout. Dylan's singing here is beyond incredible, and the lyrics again refer to other songs from Patton's "Shake It And Break It," "Kansas City," Robert Johnson's "Dust My Broom" and the ancient ballad "The Cuckoo." The song initially appears to be about a flood, but Dylan again jumps all over the map. When it gets to this verse, things change entirely:

Well, George Lewes told the Englishman, the Italian and the Jew,

"You can't open up your mind, boys, to every conceivable point of view,

They got Charles Darwin trapped out there on Highway 5"

Judge says to the High Sheriff, "I want them dead or alive,

Either one, I don't care"

High water everywhere

Then Dylan pulls an astounding change of pace into a jazz-flavored "Moonlight" with the kind of sweet vocal one wouldn't necessarily expect. The melody is unlike anything he's ever written, and the sly humor once more appears, especially the way he sings this verse:

The clouds are turning crimson,

The leaves fall from the limbs and

The branches cast their shadows over stone;

Won't you meet me out in the moonlight alone?

Perhaps the lightest track on the album, there's an undercurrent in both his voice and the music that suggests something darker.

Just when you think Dylan's become a pop crooner, he slams into the album's hardest rocker, "Honest With Me." The song has a positively evil slide guitar and a vocal that grows meaner with each line. Comic lines are interspersed with lines that slay you, and the song is loaded with bizarre images where you least expect them.

Mississippi John Hurt meets Fats Waller on the next song, a country blues mixed with Dixieland that one could imagine Louis Armstrong singing. Dylan's vocal is incredibly impassioned and funny at the same time, and jokes are alternated with other lines such as "The Game is the same, it's just up on another level." And when Othello and Desdemona suddenly appear, it's not all that surprising, nor is the knock-knock joke that ends it.

"Cry Awhile" slides back into the Delta with a kind of crazy Howlin' Wolf time shift. Again the intensity in Dylan's voice, complimented by the perfect guitar work of Campbell and Sexton, make this one of the funkiest tracks he's ever done, highlighted by lines like, "Some people they ain't human, they ain't got no heart or soul."

Saving the best for last, Dylan shifts back into modern times (sort of) with "Sugar Baby," another song that's different than anything he's done. Opening with Garnier's bowed bass against a single organ chord, this is the album's saddest and most moving song. His voice is spooky, recalling the best songs of The Basement Tapes such as "Tears of Rage" and (the unreleased) "I'm Not There (1956)." Lines like "Every moment of existence seems like some dirty trick" contrast against the jokey lines, such as "I'm living with Aunt Sally, but you know she's not really my aunt."

The beginning of the second verse, "Some of these bootleggers, they make pretty good stuff," has already caused some eyes to open wide on the Internet news group, rec.music.dylan. Is he talking about bootleggers or bootleggers?

Love And Theft crosses more emotional and musical territory than any album in recent memory by Dylan—or anyone else. As on his best work of the past, you're never really sure whether it's him or a character talking. For years, Dylan has been quite conscious of time and space in his songs. Here he crosses time and subject matter with blinding speed, sometimes in a single verse or line. Virtually every topic Dylan's sung about is in this album in one way or another, from love or lost love to America to God, redemption, the terrible sadness of life and the state of the world. At times, he is at his most personally revealing, and there are several references to his parents (though, of course, sometimes it could be a character in a song). When he sings "Some of these memories you learn to live

with, some of them you can't," there is no doubt that it's coming from some place deep inside.

That Bob Dylan could pull this album out of his bag of tricks at this time is no small achievement. Yes, the Bob Dylan of another time and place could not possibly have made this album. He had to get to where he is now to do it. As a good friend of mine said after hearing it, "It's like he woke up and remembered who he is."

Madison Square Garden 2001

On November 19th 1961, Bob Dylan was probably sitting at a table in his apartment, guitar on his knee, pen in hand deciding what songs he was going to sing at his very first recording session the next day. Forty years later he returned to what really is his hometown to conquer a sold out Madison Square Garden. Bob Zimmerman may have grown up in Hibbing Minnesota, and maybe Bob Dylan was born there or in Minneapolis, but Bob Dylan grew up in New York City. It's the place he left his home for, the place where there was music in the cafes at night and revolution in the air, the place where his head was split open wide, and has been for more than 40 years the place he returns to for inspiration. It's where he "made it," where his first fans were, and for all his claims of not remembering, New York City is one thing Bob Dylan has not forgotten.

And so he returned in this scariest of times when there is a new fear every day, to this city that is like no other place in the world, to this city that has been wounded and forever changed, to this city that is trying its best to survive and heal, but will not forget what is missing from its skyline.

Riding into the city last night and standing outside the Garden on 8th Avenue, I couldn't help but steal a few very quick furtive glances south. The cloud of smoke seemed lost in the haze of city lights, but I knew the fires were still burning.

Inside the Garden, you had to open your coat and spread your arms while some guy ran an electric wand over you and told you what you had in your pockets. This is the way it is now to see a music concert. You didn't like it, but you moved on. Our seats were right at the stage, close enough to read the addresses painted on the anvil guitar cases, close enough to ask the guitar tech about those new black and white Martins, and it took a long time for the house to fill up, for all those thousands of people to be wanded.

And some time after 8 pm, long after the scheduled show time, the band in matching dark gray suits took the stage, followed by Dylan in what at first looked like a light gray suit, then a white suit, then a pink suit, and tore into "Wait For The Light To Shine," and the ghost of Hank Williams hovered around that man in the gray pink suit, and the ghost of Bill Monroe and the music he invented flew

out of Larry Campbell's mandolin and you could almost see ancient funky tour busses on the midnight highways next to all them rebel rivers and a lonesome Cadillac on their way to Ohio and all that music that came out of somewhere from the South to the North and back again and it was about the music. But it wasn't. Because this singer, whether he admits it or not, always has a message to deliver, and on this night, "Keep lookin' for a sign," came out of that craggy, but still strong voice that has seen too many cigarettes, that has traveled to too many joints, that has lived the profound truth that exploded, and on every chorus, every time it came around, that voice that somehow knows every mile of every road its walked down made sure that was the line you noticed, "Keep lookin' for a sign."

And then it was time for the trip backwards and forwards. "It Ain't Me Babe," a song performed on almost every tour, a song that's been performed innumerable ways, the ultimate I'm not what you think I am or think you want song, a song defiant, angry, mocking, sad, tender, that's been rocked and socked, and crooned and shouted, and tonight it was handled with care, almost caressed, and then he stepped back towards the top of his tan Fender Bassman, where the harmonicas lay, and as someone once wrote about Bob Dylan's very first performance at Madison Square Garden, it's not Bob Dylan till the harp comes out, and as he picked up the harp, he noticed, realized there were all these people sitting behind him and he put to the harp to microphone and blew those first notes right at them and the hundreds of people sitting there knew he was doing it for them, and this is where the singer turns into magician and master performer and he turned back to face the main crowd, with that crazy almost funny way he was of moving forward, knees bent, the notes ringing clear danced around the melody, up and down like a clown on the circus sands, twisting and turning, to a magnificent conclusion.

And then it was time for the masterpiece, the song like no other that came before, the song that held all the songs he didn't think he'd have time to write, the song that announced there's a new Poet in town, a song that was terrifying then and perhaps more terrifying now, and even though he's been singing it at other stops on this tour and has been singing it across the world and back for four decades, you knew he had to sing it tonight in the city that's been ten thousand miles in the mouth of a graveyard.

And then it was back to a different graveyard, another time, another place, where bluegrass harmonies came through on ancient wooden radios that looked like Cathedrals on a parlor table on a Sunday afternoon, the words of a drunken cowboy poet who would sell his songs for another shot of whiskey, that had been all but forgotten till Bob Dylan started singing his songs again. This song about another war, from another place, but maybe it's the same war. Maybe it's all the same war.

And suddenly we're back in the present, but maybe not. One time a King spoke in a most meaningful way, "Mr. Dylan has come out with a new record. This record of course features none but his own songs..." And the tribal almost

voodoo beat of “Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum” began making its spooky voyage to the sun, the guitars echoing songs from long ago, recorded in midnight studios a few blocks away, when the words came in chains of flashing images, like they do on this song recorded in a studio probably a few blocks away where the words came again all the way from New Orleans to Jerusalem, from somewhere down a rabbit hole to a brick and tile company, trusting their fate in police permits and the hand of God.

And now we’re back inside the rain of “Just Like A Woman,” and I think of how I heard Bob Dylan from a few feet away tell a reporter in a hotel ballroom a few blocks north how this was his favorite song, and that even though it was recorded in Nashville the music was sort of from that other Tennessee city to the west, but the rain, the fog, the amphetamine the pearls and Queen Mary couldn’t have been anywhere else but Manhattan, and then I notice that he’s answering each line with little licks on that custom-made cream-colored Fender Strat, and there are no throw-away guitar licks, and guitar tone is just right and he doesn’t stop and it keeps building and then he’s doing that backwards sort of dance and turns around to get the harp and again the crowd behind him goes nuts and again the first few notes for them and he turns around and crouching down he just goes crazy, the Isis harp dance, 30 years later and crowd is going nuts and he knows exactly what he’s doing, and then the intro to “Just Like Tom Thumb’s Blues,” and you know why he’s singing it and it’s a special gift and everyone who realizes is just waiting for that one line. And I think back to the time I first heard it, the first time it was performed on a freezing August night in a tennis stadium somewhere off the E train as a cold wind blew and cops chased teenage boys in and around the musicians on stage who never stopped playing and how that was the song that night that really hit me and then the line came and you had to cheer, but it’s time for more blues. “Lonesome Day Blues,” that starts off so simply you think it’s gonna be nothing except it’s the way he sings it. It’s always the way he sings that really makes a song matters, and the verses keep coming and suddenly it’s “My captain he’s decorated, he’s well-schooled and he’s SKILLED, and there’s no mistaking the snarling sarcasm, the total menace in his voice and suddenly the man on stage is filled with the spirit of every blues singer that journeyed on Highway 61, got cut in bar fights and sang on street corners. And then it’s deeper into the blues, the song for the blues man who might’ve been the scariest of them all, Charlie Patton, “High Water,” but it’s not only the blues, there’s that banjo in there and maybe half a dozen other old mountain tunes, and maybe it’s about a flood, but then maybe it’s the just a flood, because the words ring out a warning, and maybe in a sense this is the ultimate American roots song but again this is a singer who always brought the news: “Things are breakin’ up out there.”

Then Larry’s fingerpicking takes us back to another time, an album cover of snowy streets, when a chain store or a MacDonald’s in that part of New York was unimaginable, before the Disneyization of America, and I thought of another time, another concert, my first time seeing him in New York City, in a then pretty new concert hall, where no folksinger had played before, and how he shouted

this song as loudly as he could into the mic, and brought that very shiny Nick Lucas Gibson right up to the mic between the verses and it was funny and great and new, and then let loose with a harmonica solo that chugged like a train and could only be described as crazy and now for the third time he's going back for the harp as I hoped he would but didn't at shows the week before and picked up that harp and let loose a solo that went all the way back to that chilly October night, that last solo New York concert where people felt free enough to shout out requests and he'd actually answer them and there was no doubt in my mind that that harp solo was his little gift to New York, but then we're standing on the highway with that kid on his way, with dreams and tales of carnivals he'd been to only his mind and blues singers he never played with, but someday would, and he's in high gear, a raging Mustang Ford, and the delivery is staccato syncopated charging against the rhythm, and suddenly we're on a battlefield alone, the soldier who didn't know what he was getting into, the mother in for the wrong surprise, the hall is hushed and it's all about the words and there's no doubting what this song is about.

Then just as the mother is leaving the station with the medals in her hand, the scene shifts entirely and we're into a super-charged "Summer Days" except the summer days are gone. And as he has been all night, Dylan is really singing, nailing each song and the nails are going down hit hard by the three guitar assault and all is quiet for "Sugar Baby," done slowly, carefully, eloquently, and just as you're recovering, wham, into a more than hard rocking "Drifter's Escape," and in the middle out of nowhere comes this very funky guitar solo that takes the song even higher, and it's not noodling and it's not searching, it's just going and going and it's not Charlie Sexton and it's not Larry Campbell, it's Bob Dylan and he's riding it for all it's worth and he is absolutely determined to show everyone that yes he can take that Stratocaster and make it lift up its glass and sing.

The familiar intro to "Rainy Day Women" lets you know the show's almost over and you don't want it to be over and the band seems to be jamming on this one more than they did in DC and Philly and it's time for the band introductions, and just like on every other show on this tour, Dylan starts, "Ladies and Gentleman, I wanna introduce my band, the best band in the land," and then he paused for just a second and he said, "Most of the songs we're playin' tonight were written here and those that weren't were recorded here. So no one has to ask me how I feel about this town." And then he went on to introduce David Kemper as the only drummer who's better than no drummer at all. Make no mistake, it was a highly emotional moment.

On the way off the stage, Dylan paused for the people in the back, reached up started shaking hands and autographed a CD or two.

The encores were just icing on a very rich cake. "Rolling Stone" was notable for the way he sang "everything everything everything he can steal," "Blowin' In The Wind" and "Forever Young" were packed with emotion and, "Thing Have

Changed," "Watchtower" and "Honest With Me" all rocked hard. Donning a black hat as he left the stage, he again stopped to give autographs and acknowledge the people who watched the show from the rear.

Bob Dylan came home last night, and while the set list might look very much like every other set list on this tour, in everything he did, every word he sang, every little gesture, let the audience know how much New York means to him.

Dylan at Newport, 2002

In 1963, when Bob Dylan arrived at the Newport Folk Festival, he was an up-and-coming folksinger and songwriter whose songs were starting to be covered by a number of people. Important people too like Pete Seeger and the biggest folk group of the time, Peter, Paul & Mary who had a massive hit with Dylan's "Blowin' In The Wind" pretty much as Newport was happening. Three days later, when Dylan left the Newport Folk Festival, there was no doubt he was a star.

Things were a lot different back then. This music called folk was in a boom, partially due to an ABC television show called "Hootenanny." New folk groups were sprouting up left and right. Newport didn't have much to do with that as many of the founders of the festival couldn't appear on "Hootenanny" due to the blacklist, and many of the performers, Dylan included, boycotted "Hootenanny" in support of those blacklisted.

There were other folk festivals around the country, in Philadelphia, in Monterey, California, but Newport was the big one, the one that could make a career. At the first Newport festival in 1959, Joan Baez in an unscheduled guest appearance singing a duet with Bob Gibson quickly found herself courted by record companies. In those days, Newport covered the entire spectrum of folk music from "commercial" artists such as Peter, Paul & Mary to traditional singers such as Almeda Riddle. A festival would feature over 100 different artists and the lineups to say the least were incredible including blues legends such as Son House and Mississippi John Hurt to Bill Monroe or Flatt and Scruggs and what was termed at the time, the new breed of "city folksingers." Dylan wasn't the only singer from the Greenwich Village-based community of topical songwriters that year. Also appearing were Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton and Peter La Farge.

But as the festival ended that year, Bob Dylan was the name on everyone's lips. He'd shared the microphone with both Seeger and Baez, and closed the festival in a grand finale of "Blowin' In The Wind" and "We Shall Overcome" linking hands with Baez, Seeger, Peter, Paul & Mary, the Freedom Singers and Theodore Bikel. He was the new radical folk hero following in the footsteps of Woody Guthrie and no one could touch him.

The following summer when Dylan returned to Newport, things had changed. His songs had been widely recorded, he'd graduated from performing in coffeehouses and clubs to concert stages, he was the star of the folk music world. And to the great disappointment of a certain contingent of the folk world, he was no longer writing outright protest or topical songs though he and Baez reprised their duet of "With God On Our Side." The songs Dylan sang that summer were from his forthcoming album, *Another Side of Bob Dylan* and along with one – according to *Sing Out!* magazine – his most requested song, "Mr. Tambourine Man," (which did not make the album) were of a more personal nature, dealing with one-on-one relationships. One could make a case that one of the songs, the visionary "Chimes of Freedom" covered everything Dylan had tackled in his more topical songs in one swoop.

In the issue of *Sing Out!* (the folksong magazine) following Dylan's 1964 Newport appearance, editor Irwin Silber did an extraordinary thing based on what he saw Dylan sing at Newport. He wrote an "Open Letter To Bob Dylan" for all intents and purposes chastising him for abandoning the protest movement, saying "Your new songs seem to be all inner-directed now, inner-probing, self-conscious..."

When *Another Side of Bob Dylan* was released a few weeks later, the music revealed something else as well. Though Dylan was still playing solo on guitar, harp and for the first time piano, "It Ain't Me, Babe," "Spanish Harlem Incident" and "I Don't Believe You" pointed the direction towards rock and roll.

On his autumn tour of the U.S. Dylan showed little signs of abandoning topical songs. His shows began with "The Times They Are A-Changin'" and included "Hard Rain," "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll," and "Talkin' World War III Blues" in addition to debuting such songs as "Gates Of Eden," "It's All Right Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" and "If You Gotta Go."

However that February, a different Bob Dylan appeared on Les Crane's late-night talk show on ABC. Gone was his standard concert clothing of suede jacket and jeans, replaced by a suit and Dylan sang two songs accompanied by Bruce Langhorne playing an acoustic guitar with a pick-up. Despite the acoustic guitar, "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" did not sound like folk music.

A couple of weeks later "Subterranean Homesick Blues" was released as a single and there was no longer any doubt – Dylan was backed by a full band. The flipside "She Belongs To Me" decidedly had a pop flavor to it. A few weeks after that, *Bringing It All Back Home* was released and from the red, white and blue cover which had more photos on the back than any previous Dylan album to music inside, the first side with a band, the second side, accompanied again by Langhorne (on two songs), it was obvious that big changes were afoot. The album was also accompanied by a much different publicity campaign than Dylan had received previously. Record store displays included cardboard stand-ups of Dylan holding a Fender Stratocaster wearing the suit and shades, and printed on them one of two slogans. "Bob Dylan Brings It All Back Home on Columbia

Records," or "No one sings Dylan like Dylan." At the same time new Dylan songs by other artists, and not just folksingers, but rock and roll bands started pervading the radio airwaves and climbing up the pop charts, and this was followed by various people who either sounded like Dylan or wrote songs sounding like Dylan songs.

Following the release of *Bringing It All Back Home* Dylan toured England, playing solo as he always had. When the British music papers reached the United States, it was obvious that Bob Dylan was much more than a folk singer in England, he was a star, right up there with The Beatles and The Rolling Stones.

On July 20th, a new Dylan single was released. The sound of the band was harder and fuller than on *Bringing It All Back Home* and most noticeably there was an organ. "Like A Rolling Stone" received airplay on the major AM radio rock stations such as WABC in New York much faster than "Subterranean Homesick Blues" and quickly climbed the charts.

Four days later Bob Dylan returned to the Newport Folk Festival and playing solo, performed two songs at a contemporary songs workshop, "All I Really Want To Do" and "Mister Tambourine Man." The next afternoon Dylan, wearing an almost pop-art polka dot shirt did a sound check with members of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band and organist Al Kooper.

That night at the evening concert, Dylan wearing a leather jacket and white shirt with snap-tab collar, launched into "Maggie's Farm" and in the three minutes it took to do the song changed music completely. Many in the crowd didn't like what they heard - whether it was the rock and roll band or the inadequate sound system remains a topic of debate - and booed. Dylan did two more songs, the early version of "It Takes A Lot To Laugh" (titled by some "Phantom Engineer") and his current single, "Like A Rolling Stone," and walked off the stage. Called back to the stage by Peter Yarrow and performing alone, he did "It's All Over Now Baby Blue" and "Mr. Tambourine Man."

Thirty-seven years later the controversy of what went on that night still rages with much revisionist history. Some newspaper articles claim that Alan Lomax got in a fistfight with Dylan's manager at the time Albert Grossman over it. They did have a fistfight, but it was over Lomax's introduction to the Paul Butterfield Band, not Dylan. The most legendary story is that Pete Seeger looked for an axe to cut the sound cable. According to Seeger in an interview published in *Gadfly* magazine, he said to the person doing the sound, "Clean up that sound so we can understand the words," and they shouted back, "No, this is the way they want it." I said, "Goddamn it, if I had an ax, I'd cut the cable." Not all that surprising since Seeger toyed with electric guitars in the forties and there were electric guitars on the albums The Weavers recorded for Decca Records, not to mention that various other performers including Howlin' Wolf and Johnny Cash had appeared at Newport with bands. Some writers now based on tapes of the show are trying to claim no one booed. However all press accounts at the time

as well as people I've spoken to who were there said there was booing and shouting.

Bob Dylan typically had little comment, though at a press conference later in the year in Berkley, California, he laughed it off by saying, "I did a very crazy thing."

The Newport incident extended to Dylan's next tour. At his next show at Forest Hills Stadium in New York, the audience was clearly divided with booing taking place during the entire electric set. At a show I saw in Newark, New Jersey that October there was no booing at all, but clearly by the time Dylan reached England the following spring, the folk versus rock argument had reached amazing proportions. Many of the reasons behind this can be found in C.P. Lee's book *Like The Night*.

Within two years of Newport, nearly every musician under the category of folk music had electric instruments on their album, including some who had accused Dylan of selling out. But the folk boom of the sixties for all intents and purposes was over. A year and a day after he shook Newport 1965, Dylan had a motorcycle accident. He would not tour again for eight years, but his next official appearance was on-stage with none other than Pete Seeger at the Woody Guthrie Memorial Concert at Carnegie Hall in New York held on January 20th, 1968. Dylan performed three rocked-up Guthrie songs with a band called the Crackers (who would soon be known as The Band), the same band he toured with following Newport in '65 and '66. There were no boos, most of the audience was glad to know he was alive and well.

The Newport Folk Festival was cancelled in 1971 and resumed 15 years later in 1986. The notion of Dylan performing at Newport or any of the other folk festivals seemed a non-issue though he did attend the Mariposa Folk Festival where he had to be escorted off the island and made a secret visit to the Philadelphia Folk Festival in 1972.

During the next 30 years Dylan showed on record and in concert that he had never really abandoned folk music at all. John Wesley Harding was a return to an acoustic sound, *Self Portrait* included quite a few traditional songs, and many were included in the *Rolling Thunder Revue*.

And also over those 30 years, folk music and folk festivals changed. The new folksingers were by and large singer-songwriters and classified as folk simply because they used an acoustic guitar or if they didn't rock out too much. And where Newport was all-inclusive as far as music was concerned, soon the music was splintered again. Blues artists played blues festivals, bluegrass musicians played bluegrass festivals.

In 1988, Bob Dylan began what is generally referred to because of a magazine article, the Never Ending Tour. After years of experimenting with various styles, and various bands, and being backed by already existing bands, he put together a small four-piece band and simply went out and played, electric and acoustic,

songs from throughout his career. One of the more interesting things about this tour was on every show he started including traditional folksongs. And as the tour went on, more and more of these songs kept appearing. In 1992 and 1993, he recorded two albums of essentially traditional ballads and blues *Good As I Been To You* and *World Gone Wrong*. And as he continued to tour more songs kept appeared often taking the opening spot, bluegrass songs, blues song, country songs, songs not always traditional by the strictest definition, but songs certainly from a tradition. And as these songs appeared, some of Dylan's fans would track down the source of these songs, and sometimes they would lead to musicians they didn't know about. Now Bob Dylan simply may have been doing songs that he liked to sing, but the end result was that he was exposing a large group of people to music they might not have bothered to explore otherwise from the reasonably well-known bluegrass group the Stanley Brothers to the country duo Johnny & Jack, to Elizabeth Cotton, the Mississippi Sheiks and many more. The irony is that this is what quite a few members of the original board of directors of the Newport Folk Festival had been attempting to do all along, and here was the all-time bad boy of Newport, the guy who dared to say, this rock and roll just might be folk music too turning more people onto Jimmie Rodgers, Leadbelly and the Carter Family than they ever could have imagined.

Flash forward to May 2002. Bob Dylan's tour schedule reveals he is playing Newport Rhode Island on August 2nd, and people quickly realize that is also when the Newport Folk Festival now under corporate sponsorship is taking place. If Bob Dylan acknowledged this at all, he did so in typical fashion on tour in England by opening a show soon after the official announcement with the first-ever acoustic version of "Maggie's Farm." The Newport schedule for the most part is loaded with singer-songwriters. Gone are the workshops on traditional songs, blues, and old-time music.

As the weekend approached, newspaper articles started appearing with every authority, would-be authority and non-authority – most of whom weren't even there – weighing in on what did or didn't go down at Newport in 1965.

Finally it's the day. The East Coast has been in a heat wave for weeks and even on the shore of Narragansett Bay it's so hot and humid that the slightest movement brings buckets of sweat. The festival along the sides of an old fort is packed. Walking in, the tiny "Roots Stage" is jammed in with the vendors, almost a souvenir stand, a bunch of singers with guitars sitting while one of them performs. There is barely room to stand and watch. Thirty-nine years ago this would have been called "The Broadside Workshop" and I wonder if Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs and Tom Paxton who were all making their Newport debuts had to perform under such circumstances, if we'd ever have known who they were. We make our way past all the vendors to wherever the main stage is. The lawn is a sea of people and blankets. Finally at some distant corner we spy just enough space to throw claim our territory. Someone's on stage, I don't know who. It's too hot to really care. There are too many people in too small a space. Checking out any other part of the festival means navigating a human traffic jam.

Shawn Colvin finishes her set and the banner that had been behind the performers all day is removed. The announcements reminding the audience to recycle are replaced with announcements not to photograph the next artist. The pre-show music heard at Dylan concerts surfaces almost inaudibly every now and then on the sound system. The scheduled time arrives and nothing happens. Roadies occasionally moving on the stage, followed by more announcements and more inaudible music. Suddenly, the music gets much louder and it's not the Newport Folk Festival anymore, it's a Bob Dylan concert. The band take their places and then he is on-stage. Binoculars go up. He's not wearing the jacket he usually wears in concert, but a white shirt and vest. But wait! Who is that guy under that cowboy hat? And what's that hair in a ponytail? That wasn't there last night in Worcester, and neither was what appears to be a pretty long beard. It sure sounds like Bob Dylan though, as he and the band launch into an old folk song, "I'm A Roving Gambler." As if the seas have parted, spaces appear in the crowd and we move up, and more spaces and we move up again. The next song starts and it turns into "The Times They Are A-Changin' " and finally we're close enough to see and the guy under the hat is some combination of pony-tailed rock and country star, Amish hillbilly, Orthodox something, and it's crazy and funny all at once, and the guy underneath the hat is playing it straight, acting like nothing different is going on, and the band is right there with him. And watching I can't help but remember the second time, I saw him, when he joked to the crowd about having his Bob Dylan mask on, and the white-faced mask (also under a hat) of Rolling Thunder, and all the other hats and masks before and since. But back to the stage and this is the master magician and the magic is in the music and they're deep into "Desolation Row," and the line about he was famous long ago for playing an electric violin, and the guy in the hat on-stage may be pretending he's someone else or somewhere else, but as usual the music speaks otherwise which is one of the tricks to this particular magic.

Then the electric guitars come out, but they've been coming out now for almost 40 years, and deep into the blues rock of "Down In The Flood," a song that maybe Robert Johnson could have sung followed by a stately "Positively 4th Street," a song that might have emerged from all that electric violin controversy, but this version is more sad than bitter, then wham, he's into "Subterranean Homesick Blues" and this version is incendiary and he's nailing every word, the band tough, strong and menacing, and that feeling of menace stays around for "Cry A While" and nastiness of the words is in direct contrast to the late afternoon sun and the boats almost lounging in the bay.

Another change of guitars, and "Girl From The North Country" and then for the first time, a song from Newports past, "Mr. Tambourine Man," slower, sadder and then suddenly leaping forward with "Tangled Up In Blue." A brief pause for another change of guitars and as the sun is setting, they charge into "Summer Days" like there's no tomorrow and only the people in the special reserved seats are sitting down, everyone else is stomping on the blankets quilted across the

field. And then the guy in the hat pulls out a real surprise, “You Ain’t Goin’ Nowhere,” and somewhere during one of the guitar breaks, the guy in the hat lets loose a broad smile, before getting back to business on “The Wicked Messenger” and closing things out with “Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat.”

After a short break, they returned with the mysterious lead singer, and charge hard into a song by another kind of folksinger, Buddy Holly and then it was hits time, with “Like A Rolling Stone,” “Blowin’ In The Wind” and “All Along The Watchtower.”

And so, after all these years, Bob Dylan returned to the Newport Folk Festival. But there was no doubt that Newport itself had changed and if there were any old ghosts hanging around, they weren’t going to be acknowledged. The guy underneath the hat may have looked a little strange, but in the end it was the music that mattered and just maybe that’s what he’s been trying to say all along.

Masked and Anonymous

“Masked and Anonymous” is a wild ride of a movie and to appreciate it it’s probably a good idea to try and put any preconceived notions about what a film is or should be aside. This is no typical or standard movie. At the same time where Dylan’s other excursions into filmmaking (“Eat The Document,” “Renaldo & Clara”) may have faltered at times, “Masked And Anonymous” succeeds, but on its own terms.

The storyline and the plot are incidental to the movie. They are pretty much a backdrop or a frame. Basically, (singer) Jack Fate is released from prison to play a benefit concert. You’re never exactly sure what it’s for. You also don’t know why Fate is in prison. What you do know is this is in a war-torn, violent, police state. You’re not even sure when this happening though ’60s references (particularly to music) abound throughout. The setting is a world gone very wrong where virtually every character apparently has suffered major burnout, and if it’s not apparent in their speech, it is in their faces. There is no luxury or relief anywhere in sight, and confusion abounds. Soldiers, armed guards are everywhere. The cars, the rooms are old, dingy, cramped with hints of the third world. The people in the movie are not of any single nationality, race or religion, but it appears they are existing (not exactly living) in some crazed inferno.

In almost every scene there is something going on in the background: People doing menial tasks, vacuuming, cleaning, constantly running around – it is rarely quiet. And if they’re not doing menial tasks, they’re praying though you’re never exactly sure what religion they’re practicing.

So with that as the backdrop, Nina Veronika (played by Jessica Lange) is trying to promote a benefit to be broadcast by the Network, which is the government. Unable to lure any of the big stars she wants, she contacts manager Uncle Sweetheart, played brilliantly by John Goodman who steals the movie who can only suggest his former client Jack Fate, a has-been singer. The Network doesn't want him. Fate as it turns out, is also the son of the dying President whose picture is everywhere. While Fate is apparently considered a laughingstock, you know there's something special about him, which comes out of course in the music – Bob Dylan music. As the camera pans through some desolate urban landscape the opening verse of "Blind Willie McTell" plays and the key line, "This land is condemned" hits hard. Dylan music plays constantly through the film, whether by him or an assortment of covers from all over the world. And it is used to great effect.

And soon it becomes apparent that this movie isn't about Jack Fate at all (or is it?) but it's about Bob Dylan, whoever that is. At the same time, it's not about Bob Dylan, but what Bob Dylan (as Jack Fate) sees. This is his vision and it's not pretty.

Throughout the film various characters, each with their own unique insanity come and go, usually delivering an intense rant along the way. Fate is the mostly silent observer and you know nothing escapes his forlorn eyes. He says little, except when he sings and occasionally delivers fairly revealing commentary over the proceedings.

Various characters can be related to people in Dylan's life. Sweetheart could be based on Albert Grossman, Bobby Cupid, (Luke Wilson) could be loosely based on Bob Neuwirth. Tom Friend, the once hip journalist who constantly pesters Fate with moronic questions ("What did you think about Zappa?" "Why weren't you at Woodstock?") could be based on Al Aronowitz. However, whether they are or not doesn't really matter.

The key to "Masked And Anonymous" isn't in the story or the characters. It's in the background, what's written on the walls, what's playing on the radio, the quick one-liners that slip out in conversation.

Even the acting doesn't matter. Some people, are good, others aren't. Giovanni Ribisi stands out as The Soldier in the beginning of the film as does Ed Harris as Oscar Vogel, a blackface minstrel who mysteriously appears, almost like an angel offering Fate advice when things get extremely desperate.

And while the film's vision is bleak and the commentary unrelenting, it is not without humor. There are both hysterical and silly moments, though being a Dylan fan may help with some of the jokes.

Will "Masked And Anonymous" be a smashing success in the real world whatever that is? Probably not and who cares? Is it landmark cinematic achievement? It

doesn't matter. It could become as Michael G. Smith has pointed out on various Internet forums a cult classic, a great midnight movie.

Like "Renaldo & Clara" it is at times like a painting, but this time, probably thanks to Larry Charles directing, it's much more focused. Consider it another chapter in the Bob Dylan canon. Perhaps the things he's wanted to say he couldn't put in a song, though at times the movie is constructed like a song. As for the critics and the general public, as this film makes clear, they never got it to begin with.

Those who are seriously interested in Bob Dylan and what he has to say will want to see it more than once because you are not going to get it all the first time. And for those who wonder what Bob Dylan really thinks about this world we exist in, well you just might find it here.

Dylan's Swing Time Waltz in the Face of the Apocalypse

Sometime back in the era of Nashville Skyline, but long before Self Portrait I was talking with a friend of mine who was heavily into Dylan, and had just written a paper for some course at Columbia University on "Time and Space in Bob Dylan songs." We were in a little hamlet called Shady in upstate New York, about seven minutes from Byrdcliffe, when he said, "I think Dylan reached a place where his dreams and reality are all one."

Fast forward 30 years to the early spring of 2000, Bob Dylan goes on tour with Western Swing band, Asleep at the Wheel as his opening act. In Reno he says they're the best band he ever toured with. Six months later in Indiana, Dylan does a Sons of the Pioneers song with pre-swing overtones, "Blue Bonnet Girl." The lead singer of the original recording was one Roy Rogers. When I was a kid, I once had a set of cowboy tunes on little 45-size 78s by Roy Rogers and the Sons of the Pioneers. It came in a little box with a handle. I wonder if "Blue Bonnet Girl" was on it. A few months after that I'm sitting in a delicatessen in New York with Asleep at the Wheel's leader and founder, Ray Benson, who I've known longer than I've been listening to Bob Dylan and ask him about that tour. "He only listens to old music," he tells me.

At the same time I'm engaged in heavy duty email correspondence with another friend. "He's moving back to becoming the guy who made the first album," he writes me.

In the fall Dylan suddenly recasts "Tryin' To Get To Heaven" as a jazz song and not long after does one of the songs I never expected to ever hear, "If Dogs Run Free," his first excursion into jazz. Before the year is out he records of all things, a Dean Martin song, "Return To Me," for the TV series, The Sopranos.

Throughout his career Bob Dylan has dropped clues about what he's going to do next among other things. Sometimes he takes his time about it. No better proof of this is the Bucky Baxter quote about we'd rehearse a song and then we wouldn't play it until a year and half later.

When "Love and Theft" was released one of the things that got lost in the rubble of that day was that in a sense it was his most musically realized album. There were several genres represented including a prototypical Bob Dylan song and Dylan's band at the time - possibly the best band he had during the Never Ending Tour - nailed them all. After years of putting down all his previous albums and producers, on "Love and Theft" you had the feeling that Dylan actually cared about the electric guitar sound. When I first heard that album one of the first things I felt was it was the most quotable Dylan album in years, and perhaps his most autobiographical.

The following year when he started playing piano again, my own feeling was he's going back to being the guy in the band in high school.

Of course the world has changed dramatically since then. I still wonder if 9/11 hadn't happened if Dylan would have done a dramatically different show that fall, where he went out and played the album, the way he did with *Slow Train Coming* and *Saved*. But instead, proving that he meant what he said when he said, "The songs are my lexicon," he reached back to Hank Williams with "Wait For The Light To Shine" to open most of the shows.

In 2005 Dylan went on tour with Merle Haggard and his band The Strangers opening. To some it was an odd choice but to those who knew Haggard's music it wasn't. Haggard, like Dylan had explored all kinds of music, doing tribute albums to Jimmie Rodgers and Western Swing legend, Bob Wills, exploring New Orleans music and various theme albums. He led one of the tightest bands in country music, capable of playing any style. Haggard is also one of the best songwriters in country music and unfortunately best known for the anti-hippie, "Okie From Muskogee," which early on gave him the reputation as a hard-core right winger. The humorous thing about all this was by the time he toured with Dylan, he was an outspoken critic of the war in Iraq and of the Bush administration.

On that tour, Dylan's band changed dramatically. Longtime guitarist and multi-instrumentalist Larry Campbell departed and at first Dylan replaced him with three people including violinist Elana Fremerman, who had opened for the Dylan/Nelson tour the previous summer. I wondered if Dylan was nervous about Haggard's band and felt he had to bolster his own, with a twin fiddle attack to match Haggard's (Haggard plays fiddle in addition to guitar).

Elana didn't last out the tour and the sound of Dylan's band to the dismay of some of his fans began to change dramatically. This year Dylan recorded a new album and then hit the road immediately. The sound of the band was quieter with a greater use of dynamics than any Dylan band on the so-called Never

Ending Tour, if not any Dylan band period. At the initial shows Dylan showed a renewed commitment to his singing.

When the cover of *Modern Times* appeared, a friend emailed me and said, "Only he would call an album *Modern Times* and put a 50-year-old car on the cover."

Modern Times is a real Bob Dylan album in every sense of the word. Like its predecessor it borrows heavily from all manner of sources from ancient poets to ancient blues singers. It is dense, and dark and deep and it takes its time in an instant access world where people wear telephones and concentration is bombarded by a constant stream of so-called information, where listening to music is now a private, not a shared experience. A world where the distractions, such as the news ticker at the bottom of every news channel are as imminent a threat as any terrorist, serving only to confuse the latest war report with the latest murder horror, athletic outrage or minor kidnapping, so it's easy to miss or maybe avoid the latest governmental or corporate menace but it's okay, put a warming oven in your bathroom to keep your towels hot after your supersonic shower and some smiling bimbo will tell you it's okay and the world is just a ducky place and the omnipresent horrors are just another digital image. No wonder Dylan chose the image of some blurry film noir Chrysler vehicle careening through the tilted Manhattan streets for the cover.

So into this constantly blinking, beeping, always noisy, interactive delusion, comes Bob Dylan, wizened prophet of long ago, part country preacher, part gambler, part old time traveling medicine show hawker con man, talking in some long ago far away language so that when some almost modern phrase such as recycling appears its jarring.

Against a backdrop of lurking horror, constant confrontation, constant violence, constant almost offhand murder, constant deceptions, deviations, detours and interruptions, some natural, most man-made, some kind of way deep romance ("Without you there's no meaning in anything I do") is going on, some kind of glimmer of happiness yearning to shine bright in the face of every conceivable obstacle.

Nothing is linear in this modern world. It's all mixed up and swimming around, much like the toy eight ball I had as a kid, where a different message would surface each time you picked it up. Just about every topic Dylan's ever delved into, which is everything is represented. Some are hinted at, some lurk beneath the surface, some clearly felt and just as clearly expressed and some are fully realized. Some lines you notice right away and haunt you every time and some you notice later and you wonder why you missed them the first time.

Someone once wrote about the Basement Tapes, it was "music remembered." *Modern Times* in every way is music remembered. Dylan can't help but quote from the old songs. They're ingrained, a part of him from the simplest folk song to what he heard on the radio while growing up, the words, the melodies, the sounds, the styles, and for those who choose to moan about this, most of the

answers are contained in the first song, with this not so subtle reminder: "I did all I could, I did it right there and then."

The music for the most part is subtle. It's not about hot guitar solos, it's about textures, it's about the blend of sound and though it leaps backwards from the opening Chuck Berry rocker to 40s and 50s pop and swing to blues and back with touches of country, it has a cohesive sound and feel. There are few notes if any that are out of place and the guitar solos aren't necessarily meant to sting, they're meant to play a part.

Dylan has already said (like he did with John Wesley Harding), "I'm not in the songs," which most likely is partially true. The "I" in "Thunder On The Mountain" isn't necessarily him, or could be him some of the time, just like in "Tangled Up In Blue," it could be a different woman in every verse. Everything that is to happen on the album is laid out on this song musically and lyrically. It's easy to pass it off as a Chuck Berry rewrite, though the acoustic guitar moves it from St. Louis (or was it Chicago) to Memphis, not to mention Dyess, Arkansas or Tupelo, Mississippi. Dylan learned long ago not to make the foolish move of tying himself down to any specific reference, but there's little doubt who and what he's talking about when he scolds, "Shame on your greed, shame on your wicked schemes."

The infatuation on "Spirit On The Water," has never been more clear and recalls every post-sixties romantic song Dylan wrote all at once ("Your sweet voice calls out from some old familiar shrine"), except he's always leaving and she's apparently cheating when he's not around, and then of course the punch line slipped in near the end, about not being able to go back to paradise because he killed a man back there, left vague and mysterious on purpose.

The sleeplessness of this track is continued to the next a rewrite of the Muddy Waters version of "Rollin' and Tumblin'." Dylan in an obvious ballsy move makes it very obvious what he's doing and that he doesn't care. He's not doing anything that just about every blues singer did, as they all had no bones about saying they wrote songs that were obviously passed down the line and this extends to A.P. Carter and W.W. Guthrie as well. Once you get deep into the song, the tone changes, and the line, "I've been conjuring up all these long dead souls from their crumblin' tombs" acknowledges the song within the song. These complaints barely surfaced when Dylan used "Good Mornin' Little Schoolgirl" to conjure up "Obviously Five Believers." Perhaps more to the point an experience remembered from the era between John Wesley Harding and Nashville Skyline. I'm in a huge apartment on the edge of Harlem where music from several rooms is emanating all the time, and we had just finished listening to Muddy Waters, when a friend says, "Yes that is great, but these are my blues, and puts Highway 61 Revisited on the turntable.

"When The Deal Goes Down" is the companion to "Spirit on the Water," and makes Dylan's feelings even clearer. One of the most tender vocals he ever recorded and one of the most careful, there's a sadness behind everything that is inescapable. It's in his voice and again he seems to comment on what he's

singing, in the lines, "I heard a deafening noise, I felt transient joys/"I know they're not what they seem."

Dylan has always used blues songs as kind of a breather in his album, especially for shifting the change of focus, and the rewrite of "Someday Baby," (another nod to Muddy Waters) serves just that purpose, and is also a chance for Donnie Herron to show what he can do on slide guitar and fiddle, making it clear they're both slide instruments. It also serves to set up as well as off, the next song and a thematic shift in the album's lyrical direction.

"Workingman's Blues #2" has one of the most exquisite introductions to any song Dylan has ever recorded. With Dylan's piano and Donnie Herron's viola, it is simply gorgeous. It is also a nod to Merle Haggard's "Workin' Man Blues," in the title, and the electric guitar somewhere in the mix at the end of each chorus, but this song is anything but the blues though the person in the song more than has them. Like "Mississippi" on "Love and Theft," it serves as the song that sounds like a Bob Dylan song. The irony of this song is the person in the song isn't working and nothing for him is working, but what Dylan does is get deep into heart, soul and thoughts of the unemployed, how it feels to be totally beaten down by innumerable forces beyond your control. And for those who would blithely dismiss this songs as nonsense, I know more people who lost their jobs and couldn't get another one during the first part of this decade/century than at any other time in my life, and most of these people were forced to take jobs paying far less than what they were making and should be making and far below their capabilities. Welcome to the real USA.

"Beyond The Horizon" serves to give the listener another break, with a Twilight Zone rewrite of "Red Sails In The Sunset," but not really. The paradise setting is deceptive, as it is dark and dreary, is ringed with flame and fire, treacherous seas, lives that have been spared and people praying for souls.

"Nettie Moore," perhaps the high point of the album is one of the most astounding tracks Dylan has recorded in the past two decades. With a singularly insistent, waiting, pacing heartbeat drumbeat, the songs moves through centuries and subjects, back and forth through time, through romance, through dreams, in a world gone black, where praying in the light, the singer wishes for darkness. At the same time the mystical rambling joker of "Love and Theft" briefly appears, but as with much of the rest of this album, the only force that diminishes grief is love.

The grief starts swinging in the face of disaster on "When The Levee Breaks," with a repeating guitar riff that is ominous and deliberate. Like "Thunder On The Mountain," it's easy at first to brush off as another blues song, and again the lyrics wander from romance to impending doom, but as each verse progresses, the lyrics get darker, sometimes in the whole verse, sometimes in the answer line. One of the few songs with guitar solos, the guitars are hot, but the sound is muted so they're just another part of the song.

The country gospel hymn, "Wayfaring Stranger," done by all kinds of singers from Burl Ives to Bill Monroe to Johnny Cash, as well as the basis for one of John Lee Hooker's scariest tunes, "Don't Turn Me From Your Door," which in turn was the inspiration for Van Morrison's "Astral Weeks," sets the tone and the canvas for "Ain't Talkin'," a major work. Quoting "Wild Mountain Thyme," Dylan (or is it a character) wanders into the mystic garden, where he is immediately attacked and finds out the mystic garden isn't a garden at all. The character in the song, using an endless list of ancient songs catalogs a list of unspeakable horrors, but keeps walking, keeps on anyway, until perhaps back at the beginning of the song, he asks a woman (who doesn't answer) where the gardener's gone, and realizes he is at the end of the world.

Using music rather words to speak, as the song ends, the same way it started, it suddenly resolves on a celestial major chord perhaps signaling the shimmering and shining light behind the horizon.

The Re-Packaging of Bob Dylan

The autumn of 2007 saw the marketing of Bob Dylan by Sony/BMG like no previous year. Of course promotion has happened every time Dylan releases anything, but this year smacked of product with a corporate touch. Sometime around the end of the summer, visitors to Dylan's official website, BobDylan.com were greeted not by the usual home page but by a page proclaiming in huge letters that essentially took up the entire screen, "Dylan 07," which turned out to be a new retrospective set spanning Dylan's career. Actually the album is simply titled "Dylan," and is available in three formats, a single disc sampler, a 3 CD digipak, and a cloth-bound box set. An I-tunes bonus was a remix by Mark Ronson of the Blonde On Blonde classic, "Most Likely You Go Your Way (And I'll Go Mine)." All this was accompanied by invitations to fans to send in stories, participate in a video, and add their own slogans to the cards Dylan tosses away in the "Subterranean Homesick Blues" video. At the bottom of the page was a slogan: EVERYTHING EXCEPT COMPROMISE. To long-time Dylan fans, it seemed exactly like compromise.

On various the Dylan internet forums across the Internet, the reaction was generally negative, with threads along the lines of "Who isn't buying Dylan 07?" Most fans had everything on it several times over and there were no outtakes or new live tracks included. Only a completist would buy this one. This set was obviously intended for those who came aboard for Dylan's last studio release, Modern Times.

Not lost in all this was the announcement of a new Dylan DVD, chronicling Dylan's performances at the Newport Folk Festival, from 1963 to 1965. Filmed by Murray Lerner who directed the '60s Newport documentary, Festival, this was Sony/BMG's gift to the fans, as it promised full-length versions of songs briefly

sampled in Festival as well as many other not only never seen, but never heard but never heard as well legendary 1965 electric set which not only changed the Newport Folk Festival, but music in general. The track list was eventually leaked before the DVD was released, and the usual forums expressed consternation at what wasn't included.

In addition to this was the impending release of Todd Haynes' not exactly bio pic, *I'm Not There*, in which six different actors portray various aspects of Dylan. Dylan had apparently given his blessing to the project by granting Haynes song rights and as it turns out a bit more. Accompanying the film was a two CD soundtrack album, featuring covers of Dylan songs by a wide assortment of artists as well as the first official release of the long bootlegged song "I'm Not There," from the sessions for what eventually became known as *The Basement Tapes*.

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Just as all these were about to be released, Dylan managed to infuriate his fans (something he has seemingly delighted in doing his entire career) by appearing in an ad for the Cadillac Escalade. Cadillac is the sponsor of his Theme Time Radio Hour on XM, and the theme the week they ad appeared was, Cadillac. However as one perceptive person pointed out in a post to several Dylan forums, the music in the ad is by Smog (aka Bill Callhan) and the images in the ad run contrary to what the ad is saying.

The just as the Cadillac furor was dying down, Dylan records a new version of "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" as well as a new video for the International Exposition on Water and Sustainable Development in Zaragoza, Spain. Two days before the Expo video appear, people who subscribe to the official newsletter of Bobdylan.com received an email "from Bob Dylan" offering discounts on a unisex robe, a Zippo lighter, and a "camo military hat."

All of the above only helps to add to Haynes' multi-person concept and while I had lived through all of Dylan's various changes, I went to see the film highly skeptical. The various trailers that made their way to Youtube did little to dissuade me.

I'm Not There ended up being a delightful and intriguing surprise. By not doing the film in linear fashion, often bouncing back and forth between time periods, at times in a dizzying manner, and toying with identity and myth as well as and fact and fiction, Haynes has managed to capture Dylan. I am usually a stickler for historical accuracy, but in this case it doesn't matter that quotes that took place in 1965 are placed in 1966, that Dylan didn't actually meet Allen Ginsberg in England in 1966 (it happened long before that) or that the character representing Dylan's manager at the time, Albert Grossman didn't fight with the character representing Pete Seeger. (In reality he fought with Alan Lomax and it was concerning Lomax's introduction to the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, not

Dylan.) Just like Dylan's music, it's the feel that matters and the feel is of being inside a Dylan song for a couple of hours.

Haynes made some brilliant casting decisions including the choice of the young black actor Marcus Carl Franklin to represent the young Dylan named "Woody Guthrie."

Not quite as successful is Christian Bale as "Jack Rollins," the folk/protest singer. Bale is too straight forward, and lacks the intensity Dylan generated as well as his humor. The same can be said for Mason Jennings who provides the musical performances during Bale's early folk segments. Bale does succeed in mimicking Dylan's restless, nervousness during a TV interview based on Dylan's 1964 appearance on the Steve Allen show, where Allen dragged on and on with interminable questions treating Dylan as something of a freak in the process. Sometimes two actors will overlap during the same period of time. Ben Whishaw as Dylan/Arthur Rimbaud and Cate Blanchett as Dylan/Jude Quinn both represent 1965/1966. Heath Ledger as Dylan/Robbie Clark and Richard Gere as Dylan/Billy the Kid cover the late '60s, early '70s. Ledger appears playing a Dylan-like character in a film during the '60s and Bale reappears as the born again Dylan of the late '70s, early '80s.

Whishaw is kind of a commentator on the proceedings, and his setting which never changes is based on the legendary televised San Francisco 1965 press conference. The majority of Blanchett's scenes portray the stoned and amphetamine driven Dylan of '66 who mostly spoke in absurdities. Bordering exaggeration, she captures both the vocal mannerisms and the marionette aspects of Dylan's physical movements during that time.

Ledger portrays clean cut the family man Dylan following the 1966 motorcycle accident, who was trying to escape his past and perhaps himself as much as possible. The epitome of this is a fictional scene that could be the Café Espresso in Woodstock sitting with his wife and another couple, where the man has to be based on singer/guitarist and Dylan friend from the Village Folkie days, Happy Traum. In 1968, Dylan did his first post-accident interview in Sing Out! (the folksong magazine) with John Cohen and Traum who was the magazine's editor at the time. Traum futilely tries to engage Dylan in discussing the war in Vietnam and Dylan is oblique at best, commenting "How do you know I'm not as you say, for the war?" In the movie, this character tries to coax an unsympathetic and evasive Rollins to take a stance and is met with hostile resistance.

The closest Dylan (in real life) ever came to some sort of a stance on the war was his name was listed as being on the board of directors for the benefit concert, Sing-In for Peace at Carnegie Hall in the fall of 1965, meaning he helped fund it. Of course a good case could be made for the war being present in the songs and in one of the more comical scenes in the film, Lyndon Johnson is seen mouthing words to "Tombstone Blues." Nonetheless the war is present in the movie. The character representing Jack Rollins' wife is continually watching news reports of

the war on TV and as Nixon announces the war's end, she announces the end of the marriage, something that is roughly accurate time-wise and one of Hayne's surprising insights.

Gere portrays the darker, dream mode Dylan, the creatively lost Dylan, but one who still sees. On one hand he looks too old, too wizened for the part but in his role as the seer, it works. The time frame is murky and confusing. However in the early '70s, there were a few years where Dylan was barely creating new songs. His appearance in Sam Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* signaled the end of that period and a few months later Dylan's 1974 return to the stage which is not covered in the film was announced.

In this segment Billy/Dylan is at first walking with his dog who runs away, and wanders into the town of Riddle (mentioned earlier by the young Guthrie Dylan) where it is Halloween all the time and the characters range from Shakespearian to cowboys to medieval clowns and carnival sideshow freaks. Many of the characters, their names as well as the lines they speak are right out of *The Basement Tapes*, as well as the much later *Rolling Thunder Revue*. The town is controlled by a fictional Pat Garrett who wants to put a highway through the middle of the town and "Billy" wearing a plastic mask reminiscent of the one Dylan wears in the opening song of his film *Renaldo & Clara* is forced to take a stand. However in this particular segment it's the vision, the made-up, costumed townspeople that's as important if not more important than the storyline, perhaps signaling that the spark is still there, waiting to be unleashed. Ultimately "Billy" is arrested, breaks free, leaves town, finds his dog who stays behind as he hops a freight train and finds the same guitar case the young Dylan early in the film was carrying.

Somewhere in the middle of this, the born again segment is thrown in which is possibly the one time the film (to me) fails, precisely because it feels like it was thrown in, almost as if Haynes knew he had to work it in, but wasn't sure how.

Following the born again scenes, is where "Billy" finds the guitar case, but before that the film flashes again to the Blanchett Dylan riding in a limo explaining the myth and mystery of folk music in somewhat absurdist terms, and then as Gere picks up the guitar, suddenly Bob Dylan himself from 1966, in footage from his film, *Eat The Document* appears playing a wonderfully wild harp solo on "Mr. Tambourine Man" while a crowd of people at the obviously full hall listen on speakers placed outside. A fitting conclusion. Though the post gospel era Dylan is not represented, the lengthy rap on traditional music covers much of what Dylan has done in the last 20 years onstage and on record, he re-explored the traditional music that initially inspired him.

But the scenario does not capture the film. Beautifully filmed, alternating between black and white and color, almost every scene pays homage to a known photo or a (Dylan) film scene as well as referencing a host of other movies and virtually every line (or so it would seem) is from a song, a poem, an interview, or

a previous Dylan film. That they're often mixed up time-wise, or who originally said them for instance, when the character representing Albert Grossman is actually speaking the words of Phil Ochs when he says, "It's too dangerous for him to go on stage" doesn't matter. It's the effect Haynes is aiming for and it adds up in the end.

If the film has a failing it that only the diehard fan is going to recognize the references. I'd be willing to bet as I'm writing this someone somewhere is hard at work on a website that will eventually catalog and annotate the origin of every scene and every line.

At the same time it is why the film works as a convincing portrait because all of Dylan's work is loaded with references whether musical, literary, cinematic, historic or spiritual. It's why his work has been analyzed and dissected for four decades and more than likely will be for decades to come.

Not to be forgotten is Haynes' use of Dylan's music, often by Dylan himself and far more than the soundtrack album would lead you to believe. Again Haynes goes for mood more than anything else and one of the more revealing things he does is to songs from the past decade to punctuate scenes from 40 years ago, making you think of those songs in a new light. Two songs used in the period they were written are particularly effective, "Ballad of a Thin Man" used in tandem with an obnoxious reporter and "Idiot Wind" in the scene depicting the end of the fictional marriage. Interestingly enough the version of "Idiot Wind" used is the more meditative outtake version from the original sessions for *Blood On The Tracks* which was eventually released on *The Bootleg Series, Volumes 1-3*.

What is also remarkable about Hayne's achievement is the number of classic songs that are nowhere to be found, for instance "Blowin' In The Wind."

Dylan of course has attempted to explore the same territory in the much maligned, perhaps over ambitious *Renaldo & Clara* and to a degree in the more recent *Masked And Anonymous*. In the former he jokingly cast Ronnie Hawkins as Bob Dylan, while he played Renaldo. My brief impression of that movie was that every male character represented Bob Dylan. In *Masked And Anonymous*, he portrayed an imprisoned ex-rock singer named Jack Fate, and my impression was that movie was more about what was happening in the background than the actual storyline. Dylan's never really succeeded onscreen as an actor portraying someone else. At the same time he's been great at playing the ever changing role of Bob Dylan for well over 40 years, and that most of all is what Haynes captures.

By comparison the impact of Murray Lerner's *The Other Side of the Mirror* is tame. But it does provide not only an excellent glimpse of what Dylan was like as a performer at the beginning of his career and chronicles the astounding changes he went through as both performer and song writer in three years. The changes in his physical appearance are obvious as well as he goes from the

bumbling comical kid in loose fitting clothes who takes several tries to get a capo on his guitar correctly to the total professional of 1965, in a well cut sports jacket.

Once he starts singing however, the performances are for the most part riveting. In 1963 the standouts are the rarely played "North Country Blues" and "Only A Pawn In Their Game." Dylan came to Newport as one of a bunch of young topical singer-songwriters playing in Greenwich Village and left a star in the folk world. This was the Dylan I first saw a few months later, a week after the Kennedy assassination playing a sparsely attended concert at the Mosque Theater in Newark, New Jersey. Included is the all (folk) star version of "Blowin' In The Wind" where Dylan is joined by Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Peter, Paul and Mary and the Freedom singers. Also included are a couple of duets with Joan Baez, one of which, "With God On Our Side," was included on the Vanguard album of 1963, Newport Broadside. As for the Baez duets (two more are included in the 1964 segment, one a brief reprise of "With God On Our Side," let's just say that when they reunited a little over a decade later for the Rolling Thunder Revue, they were far more rehearsed and had learned how to sing with each other. Also on the Broadside album was a duet with Pete Seeger on "Playboys and Playgirls" which is not in the film. The cover of the DVD case is a replica of the Jules Halfant design of the cover of Newport Broadside.

By 1964, the protest singer Dylan is nowhere to be found, except for the Baez duet. Instead he sings two new songs, a beautiful "Mr. Tambourine Man" at an afternoon topical songs "workshop" and an astonishing though slightly edited "Chimes of Freedom" at the evening concert. On the latter song, you can see the delight in Dylan's eyes as he sings. It's almost as if he can't believe he wrote the words he's singing. It was these performances that caused Sing Out! editor Irwin Silber to write his "Open Letter to Bob Dylan" in the issue following the festival that chastised Dylan for singing "inner directed, inner probing songs" instead of protesting. Following "Chimes," the audience to the consternation of emcee Peter Yarrow refuses to leave calling for an encore for at least five minutes. Finally Dylan reappears, jokingly says, "It's a time thing," and tells the audience he loves them.

The inner probing Dylan is still there in 1965, performing acoustic versions of "All I Really Want To Do," which opens the film (the remainder is mostly chronological) "Love Minus Zero/No Limit" and "If You Gotta Go." By this time Dylan is a seasoned professional, though the friendly interaction with the audience which is in all the previous performances is much in evidence. At the beginning of Dylan's afternoon segment, Yarrow again tells the audience that following Dylan's set they have to "split as quickly as possible" because they're already overtime and holding up the next workshop. If you watch real closely, Dylan says, "Who says?" while he's putting on his guitar. Unfortunately missing from this segment is the debut of "Tombstone Blues."

The action quickly switches to an electric rehearsal sound check where a shirtless Yarrow's clueless-ness (and that's being kind) is all too evident. As they start to play he stops them reprimanding them to not only check but remember

their sound levels. Dylan and the members of the Paul Butterfield band plus Al Kooper are jokingly ignoring him as Butterfield sitting on a wall watches in the background.

Then suddenly it's nighttime and they're into "Maggie's Farm" with Bloomfield's guitar dominating. Dylan is totally confident and assured. At the song's conclusion loud booing is heard. This booing (also heard in the brief film clip used in Martin Scorsese's *No Direction Home* is not evident on any of the bootleg recordings of the show. Then skipping "Phantom Engineer" (an early version of "It Takes A Lot To Laugh") they're into the live debut of "Like A Rolling Stone" which was already a hit on Top 40 radio stations. During the song you can hear an equal mix of booing and cheering and at the song's somewhat stumbling conclusion, Yarrow again tries to placate the crowd saying, "Bobby thought he only had a certain amount of time." Yarrow clearly does not know what to say, and then says, "Bobby's coming back, he's getting his acoustic guitar." Dylan, putting on an acoustic guitar shoots him a look that one would not want to be the receiver of. Dylan seeming unfazed returns for "Mr. Tambourine Man." Unprepared to be doing an acoustic set, he asks the crowd for an E harmonica, and you can hear the thud of several harps being thrown on stage. Dylan then offers his appropriate farewell to Newport, "It's All Over Now Baby Blue." The Newport Folk Festival continued for a few more years and then was resurrected a couple of decades later. It never really recovered though and for all intents and purposes it was the end of the folk music movement of the '60s.

As for the albums, the *I'm Not There* soundtrack is a huge cover album. It's interesting for the songs it doesn't have (many of the standard classics are missing) as for the songs it does have. Many of the songs are drastically rearranged, but hell Dylan himself does that every night. Some of the arrangements are interesting for what they add to the song, others fail completely. Some of the songs that are actually in the film such as Tom Verlaine's "Cold Irons Bound" work in the context of the film, but fall flat on record. Others are just too damned pretty. To sing Dylan, you need to sing with a certain amount of intensity, power and grit. The Band for instance knew how to do it. Too often that intensity is missing.

Occasionally the musicians sound like they're having fun, as Yo La Tengo clearly are on "I Wanna Be Your Lover." And fun is an important ingredient. As Levon Helm once told me during an interview, "If you ain't havin' fun, it ain't worth a shit." And Dylan clearly likes to have fun both on record and in concert. Again one of the great things about the Newport video of "Chimes of Freedom" is that as serious as the song is, he's having fun singing it.

The two other songs that really work for me other than Dylan singing "I'm Not There," which is simply one of the greatest things he ever did even if half the words are gibberish he's making up as he's going along, are Los Lobos' excellent version of "Billy 1" from Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, and Jim Jones and Calexico's "Goin' To Acapulco" from the *Basement Tapes*. The horn arrangement perfectly adds to the song, and Jones' soulful vocal makes the song his own.

The box set Dylan is sort of okay if you want to introduce somebody to Dylan's music. Programmed chronologically (though "It's All Over Now Baby Blue" is out of place, the album with the most songs included is *Freewheelin'*. Several important albums have one song and *Saved* is ignored entirely. The hits and near hits are all included and one could quibble forever about what's not included. For every song on there, another could easily take its place. However there is one serious omission, the song many consider to be the greatest of all, where poetry, mood and tension all add up to one starting narrative, "Visions of Johanna."

Tell Tale Signs

It was the late summer of 1989, and one day a package with a cassette inside appeared in the mail. The cassette was an advance copy of the new, as yet, unreleased Bob Dylan album, *Oh Mercy*. All I knew was the album was recorded in New Orleans with producer Daniel Lanois, whose work I mainly knew from the first Robbie Robertson album.

It was the second year of what would become known as the Never Ending Tour, a tour where anything could and did happen, and a tour that would eventually redefine Bob Dylan's entire career as a musician. The previous tours of the past few years had been with either the Grateful Dead and Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers. Both tours had their moments, but I left all those shows feeling something was missing, that Dylan needed his own band. The show with the Dead in Philly was to say the least controversial, and a lot of people were whining they'd never see him again. Back then, there were still disc-jockeys and radio stations that cared about music and their comments ranged from sort of sympathetic to what was that!?

For me, he played two songs I never thought I'd see, "The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest," and even more amazingly, "John Brown," an anti-war song that appeared on an album I had, called *Broadside Volume 1*, which was a sampler of the topical songwriters of Greenwich Village in the early '60s. On that album Dylan appeared under the pseudonym Blind Boy Grunt, which turned out to be the first of many. "John Brown" was based on the traditional country song, "Reuben's Train," that had a definitive guitar lick to it, and Jerry Garcia, no stranger to traditional music used that lick in the arrangement. The show had two other surprises, "Chimes of Freedom" and "Queen Jane Approximately," and even though the latter song kind of collapsed in the middle, I didn't care. It happened to be my birthday, I was seeing Bob Dylan and saw songs I never thought I'd see. It was a hint of things to come.

When Dylan went on tour the following summer, it was with a stripped down band, and they were to say the least rocking. In those days there was no Internet to give you instant set lists each night. If you wanted to know what was going on a tour, you had to go to the library and find a newspaper from another town that

hopefully reviewed the show. So when I saw my first Never Ending Tour show at the Garden State Arts Center, in Holmdel, New Jersey, and Dylan opened with Subterranean Homesick Blues, another song I never expected to see, my mind was somewhat blown and blown even further when during the short acoustic set, he pulled out Woody Guthrie's, "Trail of the Buffalo." That fall Dylan opened up his tour with two nights at the Tower Theater just outside Philly. I was beyond belief when in the middle of the show he launched into "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream," and again two songs later, when he inserted a new verse about Vietnam into "With God On Our Side," a verse that would appear a few months later on a Neville Brothers album, Yellow Moon, that was produced by Daniel Lanois.

The next morning, I was invited to watch a recording session with Dylan's bass player at the time, Kenny Aaronson. When I arrived at the studio, my friend who was producing the session cautioned me, saying Bob was kind of mad at the band last night, so be cool. Finally at the end of the session when everyone was relaxed, I got up the nerve ask Aaronson, "Did you know Bob was gonna do 115th Dream last night?" "He kind of fooled around with it at sound check was the response."

The following summer, the traditional songs were replaced by covers of other artists such as Gordon Lightfoot, Van Morrison and country singer Don Gibson. Knowing a new album was on the way, I was hoping for new songs, but it wasn't to be.

And so I opened that envelope and put Oh Mercy on my tape deck. From the first note I knew it was a serious Bob Dylan album. Dylan's two previous studio albums were comprised of covers and originals, recorded at various sessions and were far from having a cohesive feel. A lot of people felt his best work of the past few years was with The Traveling Wilburys. Oh Mercy wasn't New Orleans R&B, it was Bob Dylan music. The sound was dense with layers of guitars, the production steamy. The songs were deep, dark and mysterious, some funny and some with anger brewing beneath the surface. In other words, everything you want in a Bob Dylan album. Immediately apparent, and perhaps best of all was that Lanois knew how to capture Bob Dylan's voice at that time. Throughout his career, Bob Dylan has had a spooky intensity, that when it happens, can cuts right through you. It's a magical thing. It cannot be defined or even named. It doesn't always happen, but when it does, you know it and it's on this album in abundance. After listening to the album, I called a friend heavily into Bob and said, "You have to hear this album." Skeptical from the last two albums, he didn't believe me. That night I went to see some friends play at a local bar and he was there. I walked in the bar, walked up to him and said, "Come out to my car right now." I put on "Ring Them Bells," "Most Of The Time," and "Man In The Long Black Coat," and watched his skepticism change to a smile.

When Dylan returned to the Tower Theater that fall, a few Oh Mercy song were in the set, but typically they sounded nothing like the record, rougher, rawer, louder. "Most Of The Time" melded right into "All Along The Watchtower." There

were surprises in store, but they weren't necessarily musical. At the end of the second night, Dylan did something I never thought I'd ever see. A crew member brought him a different microphone for his harp, and the band launched into "Leopard Skin Pill-Box Hat." During a harp solo, Dylan edged closer and closer to the lip of the stage, then jumped into the crowd still playing and ran out a side door ending the show.

When the tour resumed in 1990, with a three-set club show in New Haven Connecticut at Toad's Place, he debuted a new original song for the first time since 1981. That song was "Wiggle Wiggle." It was the last time a new original song would be debuted in concert. That show, a warm-up for the coming tour also included numerous covers songs that ranged from "Pretty Peggy-O," in a far different rendition than the one on his first album to various country songs to blues to Bruce Springsteen's "Dancing In The Dark." No one knew it at the time, but that show was a forecast of the decade to come.

Late that summer, another album *Under The Red Sky*, appeared. I was writing for a local weekly and much to the displeasure of my editor covered every Dylan show in and around Philly. Late that summer, I was contacted at the paper where I worked by Bob Dylan's publicity agent Elliot Mintz. Unfortunately, I was in the hospital, with a lot of broken bones, having been a robbery victim the night before. The day I was released from the hospital, a tape arrived in the mail from Mintz. It was *Under The Red Sky*. Produced by Don Was, it had a different sound and different feel than *Oh Mercy*. Was had a different production style than Lanois. Lanois, with a couple of exceptions provided Dylan with the same crew of musicians. Among other things, this enables a groove to happen, and once the musicians find that groove, then the sessions start to flow. While maintaining the same rhythm section, Was had different guitar players and keyboard players on each session.

Many of the tunes sounded like apocalyptic nursery rhymes and in a sense they were. It should be pointed out that many nursery rhymes were originally broadsides, sung or shouted in the streets and about topical issues, often mocking royalty. At roughly the same time, Dylan was also recording the second *Traveling Wilburys* album and touring. Following those two albums, Dylan concentrated on touring and it would seven long years before there was a new album of original Bob Dylan songs and two years, before there was another Bob Dylan album.

In 1992, with little advance notice or fanfare, a new album, *Good As I Been To You* appeared. It was Dylan alone doing old ballads, and blues, a pop song, and closing with the children's song, "Froggie Went A Courtin'." The production was minimal, the playing and singing, often rough. A little less than a year later, a similar album *World Gone Wrong*, was released. It seemed like a little more thought and care went into *World Gone Wrong*, from the song selection to the album cover, and of course the performance. For the first time since *Desire*, the album contained liner notes by Bob Dylan. Writing in a different, more linear,

though still free-flowing style than he used previously, he wrote about the source of each song and at the same time managed to connect the songs with the current time. Curiously enough, for the first time, directly addressed his fans, saying the Never Ending Tour ended with the departure of guitarist G.E. Smith in 1991, and then quite humorously naming all the subsequent tours. Nonetheless, fans continued and still continue to call it the Never Ending Tour. At that point in time, it almost seemed being a Dylan fan made you a part of some secret group. I had my friends who may have once listened to Dylan but stopped along the way, and I had my friends I shared Dylan with, which meant going to shows and trading bootlegs. When I went to England a few years later and attended a Dylan conference in Liverpool and took part some other related Dylan activities, a friend of the friend I was staying with asked me with total seriousness, "Are you part of the Dylan underground?" It cracked me up.

In the mid-'90s, that all would change with the Internet. A friend had been telling me, you have to get on the Internet, there's this Dylan discussion group, it's insane! And so I did and discovered there was not only a discussion group, Rec.Music.Dylan, but a Dylan mailing list, Hwy 61, that would deliver Dylan news (mainly from the group) right to your inbox every few hours, and tons of websites that covered every aspect of Dylan, from roots and sources of songs, to religion, to lyric interpretations, to official rarities, to statistical sites about what songs were played where, when and how many times, and then finally an official site that featured both rare and new, live versions of songs. Later on there was the Dylan Pool, where you could bet on what songs would be played during a tour, and win prizes, which also featured among many other things a database where you could look up when a song was played. It seemed as if the Internet was made for Bob Dylan fans. You could meet people from all over the world and discuss Bob Dylan

In the early winter of '97, word leaked out that Bob Dylan was recording a new album in Miami with Daniel Lanois returning as producer. There was very little info about it. Every once in a while mysterious persons would show up on the newsgroup, with little tidbits of info, maybe naming a musician or two, and promptly disappear. Then in the spring of that year, on the Friday of Memorial Day Weekend, leaving my job and turning on my car radio, I was hit with a news bulletin that Bob Dylan was in the hospital with a heart infection. I immediately recalled a day almost 31 years before when my brother came running across a field at camp to tell me Bob Dylan had been in a motorcycle crash. I sat staring for a minute, then drove home to find an answering machine full of messages and an full in-box of e-mails.

Bob Dylan returned to the road in August. Over the past couple of years he started bringing more never played or rarely played songs into the set, as well as an increasing amount of folk, blues and bluegrass songs. Among the never played songs was "Blind Willie McTell," and I kept going to shows until I finally saw it at Wolf Trap.

Sometime early in September, another advance copy of *Time Out Of Mind* appeared in the mail. The album dominated by blues, with only four out of the 11 songs being ballads. The songs were brooding with a consistent theme of restlessness bordering on despair. Many people, not realizing when the album was recorded immediately confused Dylan's hospitalization with the album. The blues had always been a staple of Dylan's music starting with his first album, and Dylan always made his blues his own, minus the vocal affectations of many of his contemporaries. On *Time Out Of Mind*, there was a difference because unlike Dylan's earlier blues recordings, there was a conscious effort to get not only the sound, but the feel of the great blues records of the '50s.

Following the album's release, there were many articles and interviews, with Dylan and Lanois. But the one article that caught the fan's attention was an interview with keyboard player Jim Dickinson, where he mentioned two songs not on the album, "Mississippi" and "Girl From The Red River Shore." He then echoed a favorite cry of Dylan fans and collectors, "They left the best songs off the album." Fans were immediately intrigued even though they only had song titles to go on. "Mississippi" was of course re-recorded for *Love And Theft*, leaving "Red River Shore" something of a holy grail for collectors. Both songs are among the many high points of this set. My reaction on hearing "Red River Shore" was the same as when I first heard "Blind Willie McTell," this is the best Bob Dylan song in ages.

For his part, Bob Dylan told the *New York Times*, "Many of my records are more or less blueprints for the songs. This time I didn't want blueprints, I wanted the real thing. When the songs are done right they're done right, and that's it. They're written in stone when they're done right."

Within a year, the onstage arrangements of many of those songs had changed considerably. Two of those changed arrangements are included here.

Dylan of course returned to the road and in addition to the songs from *Time Out Of Mind*, other songs were continually added to the set list, blues songs, country songs, bluegrass songs, songs he'd never played. A lot of people including myself would stay up until the set list appeared on the internet. Some music he dived into deeply, most notably The Stanley Brothers and the country duo, Johnny and Jack. You never knew when or where a new song would appear. It could be in Portugal, it could be in Wilmington. What was clear was that Dylan was not just performing, he was exploring and in doing so exposing his audience to all kinds of music they might not have known about. Once they heard it, or even heard about it, people wanted to know what it was, and where it was from. And usually there was someone on one of the various Dylan Internet forums who would know the answer. As a friend said to me recently, "I wouldn't have known about the Stanley Brothers if it wasn't for Bob Dylan." Simply by performing a song, Dylan did what the purveyors of the sixties folk "revival" always wanted to accomplish, without the didacticism, and, because of the Internet, the result was

world-wide. He was, as he said in the film *No Direction Home*, a “musical expeditionary.”

In the fall of 2,000, Dylan moved into an area, he’d only briefly touched before, jazz. In Dublin, he stunned the crowd at a club show with a dramatically rearranged “Tryin’ To Get To Heaven.” This was followed a few weeks later to an equally stunned crowd in Munster, when he pulled out “If Dogs Run Free,” and a month after that, by a Western Swing song, “Blue Bonnet Girl.” It was clear Bob Dylan was up to something. That something turned out to be his next album, “Love And Theft”, an album that was among many other things, an exploration of specific American roots-based music genres, an exploration that was continued five years later on *Modern Times*.

This, the eighth volume of *The Bootleg Series* isn’t only about outtakes, alternate takes, and songs never heard. It’s also about making the musical connections, connections that cover the wide canvas of American popular music. This is something that Bob Dylan has done not only during the 18 years this album covers, but for his entire career.

The rejected notes for Tell Tale Signs

[Disc One]

Mississippi (Outtake, *Time Out Of Mind*)

One of the remarkable things about Bob Dylan songs is how many different moods and feelings they can evoke, simply by how they are sung, a change in arrangement, a chord, a word, or even their placement on an album. When this song at last appeared on “*Love And Theft*”, it stood out as the prototypical Bob Dylan song on an album that delved deeply into several American music styles. The ascending bass line could be found in such predecessors as “Like A Rolling Stone,” and the loping rhythm, reminiscent of the feel of *The Band*, gave it a majesty that was instantly classic.

This version conveys a different kind of majesty and is no less powerful. Probably the first version recorded, with Bob Dylan on acoustic, Daniel Lanois, on very subtle electric and Tony Garnier on the bass, it not only takes you to the delta, but to the edge of the river. The blues guitar figure recalls Dylan’s work on the New York sessions for *Blood On The*

Tracks, particularly “Buckets of Rain.” Dylan’s vocal is almost as if he’s letting the words sing themselves, and the song is flowing through him singing hard on some lines, backing off gently on others, magically managing to pull off both at the same time.

Most Of The Time (Alternate version, *Oh Mercy*)

On *Oh Mercy*, this song was brooding bordering on menacing. This solo, guitar and harp rendition is undoubtedly a first take and a bit less melancholy in feel. The sadness found in a different, perhaps more inherent way. Where the *Oh Mercy* version seems mired in ironic denial, this one has some hope even if it’s pensive.

This is also reflected by the lyric changes in the third verse:

*I’ve got enough faith and I’ve got enough strength/I keep it all away way
beyond arm’s length*

were eventually replaced by:

*I don’t build up illusion ‘till it makes me sick/I ain’t afraid of confusion no
matter how thick.*

The former makes the next line, *I can smile in the face of mankind* more convincing. On *Oh Mercy*, it sounded like the words were saying one thing, and Dylan’s voice and phrasing were saying the opposite. At the same time, the irony was what made the song.

On first hearing, this take brought back the *Biograph* version of “Forever Young” in that it stays major where you expect it to go minor, though the bridge to the song remains intact.

Dylan’s clear and strong acoustic playing is simply terrific and his subtle use of bass lines combined with the harp goes back to another era entirely. It is not the guitar style he would use a few years later on the two acoustic albums. There is something about Bob Dylan playing alone with just guitar and harp that is immediately compelling. Hearing this, I was reminded about the stories from the *Rolling Thunder Revue* about how whenever Dylan would do his solo spot, the other performers would stop whatever they were doing and watch.

Dignity (Piano demo, *Oh Mercy*)

“Dignity” was recorded several times for *Oh Mercy*. None of the versions were used for the album though one take eventually surfaced on *Greatest Hits Volume Three*. On that version all the tracks except for Dylan’s vocal and piano were wiped and replaced by new tracks. This recording is slower and more dignified than any of the other known takes which are a bit more rocked up, reveals the original beauty of the song as well as the promise behind the lyrics. Notable for the line, *Soul of a nation is under the knife/Death is standin’ in the doorway of life*, this version, though incomplete, shows that an artist’s first instinct is usually correct.

Someday Baby (Alternate version, *Time Out Of Mind*)

On *Modern Times*, this song had a driving Chicago based groove. With its marching drums, atmospheric guitars and melodic interlude between the verses, as well as a few lyric changes, this take is far less bluesy, in fact barely at all. Based on the refrain of a classic blues song, recorded by dozens of singers under various titles, this song caused quite a bit of controversy on its release. Writing new verses to an old song (blues or not) is something Bob Dylan (along with many other musicians) has done since the beginning of his career. Once upon a time it was known as the folk process. In folk music, blues, country music, and rock and roll, the list of interchangeable verses, borrowed lines, hooks, and riffs is endless. If this somewhat spookier version had appeared on *Modern Times*, and it would have changed the tenor of the album, it would have been seen as an acknowledgement, a passing nod.

Red River (Unreleased, *Time Out Of Mind*)

From the second an interview with keyboard player Jim Dickinson, surfaced mentioning this song (he called it, “The Girl From The Red River Shore”) in which he said it was “...the best song there was from the sessions,” Dylan fans have t been intrigued, by both his statement and the song’s title, which immediately referenced a traditional song Dylan had performed, “The Girl From The Green Briar Shore.”

To say that this song lives up to imagined promise after more than a decade of anticipation is severely understating the case. This song is without question possibly the greatest Bob Dylan recording of the past quarter-century. The timbre of his voice says it all, the sadness inherent,

the vocal as real and natural as any he's done. The opening verse is exquisite:

Some of us turn off the lights and we live

In the moonlight shootin' by

Some of us scare ourselves to death in the dark

To be where the angels fly

The song begins with just guitars and bass, the lead guitar recalling Ry Cooder at his most soulful. On the third verse, organ and drums slip in followed by Augie Meyer's Tex-Mex accordion on the fourth verse, and a dobro on the sixth. The way the instruments fade in adds impact and depth not only to the verse, but the line they come in on, never interfering, only enhancing the always out-front vocal. The effect of the arrangement is like driving up a long, slow western mountain, where you don't even realize you're climbing at first.

The lyrics hit on several levels all at once and seem to move in and out of a dreamlike state. There are several quotable lines and surely such lines as the closing, *Sometimes I think nobody ever saw me here at all/Except the girl from the red river shore* will be discussed as long as people are discussing Dylan songs.

Tell Ole Bill (Alternate version)

"Tell Ole Bill" was written for the 2005 film, *North Country*. Dylan did at least a dozen takes of this in the studio. This minor key rendition is dramatically different than the soundtrack version which was based on a Carter Family song, "I Never Loved But One." There is also an old folksong, "Tell Old Bill," but the only similarity is in the title.

Playwright and actor, Sam Shepherd once wrote that "Dylan moves into mysticism with an E-minor chord," and that sentiment applies here. Lines that seemed little more than nice on the previous version, ring with startling intensity. Punctuated by the rollicking bass notes of Dylan's piano, they give the song a whole new meaning. While some of the lines reflect 19th century poetry, such lines as, *I lay awake at night with troubled dreams/*

The enemy is at the gate, move the song into another context entirely.

Born In Time (Alternate version, *Oh Mercy*)

“Born In Time,” is quite simply one of the most beautiful love songs of any Dylan era, though one couldn’t necessarily tell that from the version on *Under The Red Sky*. While some of lyric changes on other versions may have improved the song, this take cannot be surpassed for emotional impact. Why this song was left off *Oh Mercy* will remain one of the great bewildering Dylan mysteries. The instrumental backing stays subtly in the back, with Daniel Lanois’ dobro taking the lead in shimmering solos.

Can’t Wait (Demo, *Time Out Of Mind*,)

On *Time Out Of Mind*, this song began with guitars, that reflected early Chicago blues. This starts with Dylan on piano and you can hear the musicians finding their way into the song as it proceeds, as additional instruments join in. The lyrics were not yet in any definite format, and some may be startled to hear a line that ended up being one of the key lines in “Sugar Baby,” four years later: *Well my back is to the sun because the light is too intense/I can see what everybody in the world is up against*.

Everything Is Broken (Alternate version, *Oh Mercy*)

This is a more straight ahead and basic version without some of the extra instrumentation that appeared on *Oh Mercy*. Lyrical changes abound especially on the bridges, where Dylan’s voice and phrasing suddenly and almost humorously sound strangely enough like *Blonde On Blonde*.

Dreamin’ Of You (Unreleased, *Time Out Of Mind*)

This is one of the wildest tracks on the set. Set to a freeform groove that somehow manages the astounding task of being reminiscent of both “Highlands” and “Yea Heavy And A Bottle Of Bread,” with the first line using the second verse of “Standing In The Doorway.” Lines from that song and others appear in the strangest places, with Dylan half-talking, half-singing. As a song it stands on its own, and in a crazy way, manages to sum up the feel of the entire album.

Huck’s Tune (from *Lucky You* soundtrack)

This song was recorded in 2006, but because of delays in releasing the film didn't appear until the spring of 2007. Again Dylan draws on traditional music for inspiration. The finger-picking introduction that also appears between the verses, is from the Scottish ballad, "Tramps And Hawkers." A book could be written on the origins of this melody, as it appears in several Scottish and Irish songs, among them *Lakes Of Pontchartrain*, which Dylan has performed several times on stage. If you go back to "The Ballad Of Donald White" and "I Pity The Poor Immigrant," you'll find variants there also.

As with many of the other Bob Dylan songs composed specifically for soundtracks, it transcends its original intentions. The character in the songs is locked deep in despair and more than willing to admit it. With lines that constantly interchange from descriptive to poetic to matter of fact, this song deserves the attention it will hopefully receive by its inclusion on this disc.

Marching To The City (Unreleased, *Time Out Of Mind*)

This slow blues tinged with gospel, especially in Dylan's piano playing, is notable for many reasons. Shortly into the song, familiar lines from other songs appear, most obviously "'Til I Fell In Love With You," and "Not Dark Yet," but it's impossible to be sure if they started here, or if Dylan was trying lines he liked in various songs to find where they worked best.

More to the point, this is one of the strongest blues vocals of Dylan's career. He is totally at home, confident and in command. Once the band locks into the groove, they stay there as Dylan's vocal gets increasingly intense. This isn't an approximation of the blues. It is the blues.

High Water (for Charlie Patton) (Live, *Niagra*, 2003)

Suddenly we are transported to the stage, and "High Water (for Charlie Patton)" which on *Love And Theft* was rocked up bluegrass with more than a few hints of old time country, is now a ferocious rocker. No trace of its previous incarnation is to be found. Dylan's piano pounces on the chords, while the crazed interplay of the guitars of Larry Campbell and Freddy Koella take the song to another plane entirely. The whole song is one relentless attack. Dylan shouts out the vocals like a man about to be drowned, and Koella, in perhaps his finest performance with Dylan, takes his guitar into the stratosphere, staying funky the entire time, then brings it back to earth for an un-paralled closer.

[Disc Two]

Mississippi (Outtake, *Time Out Of Mind*)

This is a full-band, yet low-key rendition that kind of ambles casually along, with the power reserved for the second part of each verse. What's interesting is the feel and the beat are very close to Dylan's live performances over the past few years. Not as strong as the version on disc one, or the version on "*Love And Theft*", it's kind of an on the way marker for the future.

The Lonesome River with Ralph Stanley (Originally released on Clinch Mountain Country, Rebel Records, released May 19, 1998, recorded November 30, 1997. Bob Dylan: vocal, acoustic guitar, with Ralph Stanley & The Clinch Mountain Boys: Ralph Stanley: vocal & banjo; Jack Cooke upright bass; Ralph Stanley II: rhythm guitar; James Shelton: guitar; Steve Sparkman: banjo; James Price: fiddle; John Rigsby: mandolin.)

In the second half of the '90s, especially after Larry Campbell joined the band, Bob Dylan went through what has to be termed a major Stanley Brothers phase. It started slowly at first, but after this tune was recorded, an increasing number of Stanley Brothers songs were added to the shows, and stayed part of the shows for a few years.

The Stanley Brothers, Ralph and Carter, along with their band the Clinch Mountain Boys, are at the top of the Bluegrass pantheon, right next to Bill Monroe and Flatt & Scruggs. Carter Stanley died in 1966, but Ralph kept playing, receiving his greatest fame at age 75, for his part in the soundtrack of the film, *O Brother, Where Art Thou*. One of the great singers, his voice cuts right to the spine. On this recording, Bob sings all the verses, with Ralph coming in on the choruses.

Series of Dreams (Outtake, *Oh Mercy*)

When this song was released on the very first *Bootleg Series*, most Dylan fans stopped in their tracks. This version is similar, but stripped of the frills and overdubs done a few years later in New York. There's little doubt that its inclusion would have made *Oh Mercy* a far stronger record.

God Knows (Outtake, *Oh Mercy*)

An early version of the song that would appear in much different form on *Under The Red Sky*. The lyrics are almost completely different from the later version, leaving the last verse out entirely. Interesting to have because of the lyrical changes and the arrangement, it stands as an exception to the rule that the early versions are usually better.

I Can't Escape From You (2005)

This song written for a film, but never used, was recorded about six months before *Modern Times*. Dylan is playing organ, Donnie Herron is on piano. Dylan's is in possibly the lowest register he's put on a record. It shares with "Tell Ole Bill," and "Huck's Tune" a writing style that seems to transverse centuries, and with the latter song a description of a Christmas that is not what it should be.

Dignity (Outtake, *Oh Mercy*)

This take casts the song in a rockabilly light, and instrumentally sounds like something from Elvis Presley's *Sun Sessions*, though rockabilly songs usually do not run for anywhere near five minutes. Dylan's vocal is looser than on the other takes, and again there are quite a few lyric changes.

Ring Them Bells (Supper Club, New York, NY, November 17, 1993)

In November of 1993, Bob Dylan did four shows at the intimate Supper Club in New York. It was Dylan's first New York City club appearance since 1962, and the shows were free. All the shows were exactly one hour long, were acoustic, except for Bucky Baxter's pedal steel. Both nights were recorded and filmed, but never used, though two videos surfaced on the *Highway 61 Interactive* CD rom. Somehow Dylan managed to capture his entire career in that one hour.

I was lucky enough to see the second show of the first night, and it remains my favorite show of the "Never Ending Tour." The audience, crammed around tables large enough to hold drinks and an ashtray was ecstatic throughout. The band was tight and Dylan's singing was beyond powerful. "Ring Them Bells" was performed at every show, one of several high points at number eight in the set, and each version has something special to recommend it.

Cocaine (Live version, 1997 [????])

“Cocaine” is an old blues song originally done by Reverend Gary Davis. Dylan sang the song early in his career and revived it in the mid-nineties. Dylan quite possibly learned it from Dave Van Ronk, whose version on his album *Folksinger* was definitive. Every guitar player in Washington Square in the '60s had to know how to play Van Ronk's finger-picking part.

Dylan started singing it again at some point in the '90s and it became a staple of his shows. He even opened his 1999 summer concert at Madison Square Garden with it. This version features lead guitarist and Larry Campbell and steel guitarist Bucky Baxter on backup vocals.

Ain't Talkin' (Alternate version, *Modern Times*)

This is an earlier take of the chilling closer to *Modern Times*. This version doesn't have the intro (or the outro), Donnie Herron is on steel instead of viola, and Stu Kimball's finger-picking part is nowhere to be found. Leaning ever so slightly more towards rock, this take has several changes in the lyrics, most notably the omission of the last verse, ending with a repeat of the first verse, giving the song an entirely different meaning.

The Girl On The Green Briar Shore (Live, Gothenburg, Sweden [?????] 1992)

This song about another elusive girl, who could be a ghost, obviously part of the inspiration for “Red River Shore” was performed twice in Europe by Dylan alone on acoustic in the summer of 1992. Recorded by the Carter Family and Ralph Stanley, Dylan more than likely learned it from the singing of Tom Paley of the New Lost City Ramblers.

Lonesome Day Blues, (Live, February 1, 2002, Sunrise, Florida.)

A searing live version of one of the highlights of “*Love And Theft*”, Dylan's vocals are a raspy delight. The way he barks out various lines, starting with the opening line, emphasizing key words throughout couldn't be more perfect. The band never lets up, staying very close to the album arrangement. A book could be written about the innumerable references in this song, which include, Blind Willie Johnson, Howlin' Wolf, Woody Guthrie, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Aeneid*, by Virgil, and W.C. Fields in *The Fatal Glass of Beer*.

Duncan And Brady (Unreleased, 1992)

In June of 1992, Dylan went to Chicago and recorded several songs with guitarist and singer, David Bromberg producing. Bromberg had worked with Dylan in 1970 on *Self Portrait* and *New Morning*. Most though not all of the songs were traditional folk songs and blues. This song, usually attributed to Leadbelly became part of Dylan's live shows several years later. Highlighted by Bromberg's slide guitar, this version simply kicks. The drummer is Richard Crooks who on played on "Meet Me In The Morning" on *Blood On The Tracks*.

Miss The Mississippi And You (Unreleased, 1992)

Also from the sessions with Bromberg, one of Jimmie Rodger's classic tunes. Rodgers was one of the greatest singers, songwriters and innovators of the 20th Century. One of Dylan's best vocals from 1992, live or on record, this rendition with Bromberg on dobro and Dick Fegy on mandolin, stays true to Rodgers' original. In 1997, Dylan produced a tribute album to Rodgers with several other artists taking part. The liner notes to that album are one of the best pieces of prose Dylan has written so far.

Across The Green Mountain (*Gods and Generals* soundtrack, recorded July 2002)

Written for the epic TV film about the Civil War, this stands apart from everything else Dylan was doing musically at this time. Dylan wrote about his fascination with the Civil War in *Chronicles, Volume One*. Lyrically, it is from the period it evokes, and it's dirge-like, mournful quality will stand as one of his major works of the decade. Everything about this recording is carefully constructed, from Larry Campbell's violin to Dylan's somber vocal which has no extraneous flourishes.

[Disc Three]

Tryin' To Get To Heaven (Live, Portsmouth, England, September 25, 2000 [???))

When Bob Dylan debuted this version in fall of 2000, it was like nothing he'd done before, and immediately was recognized as a must-see performance. Hearing it the first time, felt as if this was the way he heard it in his mind, but couldn't get there at the time he wrote it. The guitar work of Larry Campbell and Charlie Sexton is celestial, and Dylan sings

with a reserve rarely displayed. Of all the hundreds of live Dylan recordings, the live versions of this arrangement are at the top.

Series of Dreams (Outtake, *Oh Mercy*)

Another take originally recorded in New Orleans, but like the one on *Bootleg Series, Volumes 1-3*, has additional overdubs, recorded in New York. The additional instrumentation here is a bit more subtle, and there are a few lyric changes as well.

Mississippi (Alternate outtake, *Time Out Of Mind*)

Musically, this take is somewhere between the one on disc one and one on disc two. The feel is kind of lazy, with Augie Meyers on organ, and Bob taking a lead. But what's really noticeable are numerous lyric changes starting with the very first line.

Ring Them Bells (Outtake, *Oh Mercy*)

Bob Dylan, solo on piano in a rendition very similar to the album take. While there were many reasons for Dylan to work with Daniel Lanois at the times he did, the intriguing thing is how well these songs stand up in solo versions. This is some of Dylan's finest piano work, and the song really doesn't need anything else.

Born In Time (Outtake, *Oh Mercy*)

Slightly more upbeat, than the take on disc one, and a little less ethereal, though it might be trying to be more so, the piano is out of the mix entirely, replaced by a lush wall of acoustic guitars, while various other instruments weave in and out, sometimes for a second and disappear. Dylan's vocal is not quite as musing as the one on disc one.

Red River Shore (Alternate outtake, *Time Out Of Mind*)

A full band version from the start with Augie Meyer's accordion leading things off, and the Tex-Mex feel is more prominent, aided by a mandolin that appears at key moments, and occasional Spanish guitar licks, that arrive and vanish like the girl in the song. Dylan's vocal is no less impassioned.

Things Have Changed (Live, 2001)

Written for the film, *Wonder Boys*, this Oscar-winning song earned Dylan his first regular airplay for a new song in quite some time. It's always a good idea not to compare a song, especially one written specifically for a project, to anything in an artist's life, but the alienation expressed in the lyrics resonated way beyond the film to the time in which it was released. This live version finds the song in a more rolling arrangement, with his excellent band at full power. Dylan sings the line, *Just for a second there, I thought I saw something move*, as if he actually did just see something move.

Doin' Alright (Alternate outtake, *Time Out Of Mind*)

"Doin' Alright" would've fit right into the *Basement Tapes*. In essence this is "Marching To The City," in a more jaunty groove, moving at a fast clip towards metamorphosing into "'Till I Fell In Love With You," with quite a few improvised detours on the way. Once again, various lines, some familiar, some not are interjected, while others are quickly abandoned.

Down Along The Cove (Live, June 11, 2004, Bonnaroo, Music Festival, Manchester, Tennessee)

For anyone who hasn't been to a Dylan concert in the last decade, and only knows this song from *John Wesley Harding*, what was a mild country boogie, is now a full blown rocker, with new chord changes and a lot of action along that cove, with several new verses. More to the point, this song sizzles, the guitars never rest. This soundboard recording captures not only the musicians (you can actually hear what Tony Garnier is doing on bass) but the excitement of the audience as well. Experiencing this song live is a word not usually associated with Bob Dylan, and that word is fun.

Most Of The Time (Outtake, alternate version, *Oh Mercy*)

Very close to the track on *Oh Mercy*, this take has some additional instruments brought up in the mix, and the bass is even more out front. The guitars still wail in the background, creating a murky, swampy haze. While Daniel Lanois' production will always be controversial in some quarters, one of the things he truly knew how to do was capture Dylan's voice during this period and he did so to maximum effect.

Cold Irons Bound (Live, June 11, 2004, Bonnaroo, Music Festival, Manchester, Tennessee)

On *Time Out Of Mind*, the ghost of Howlin' Wolf hovered all around this song. In concert, it turned into something else entirely and for quite a while was the mid-point show stopper. This song is meant to be played loud! The band is roaring and Dylan right there roaring with them

Can't Wait (Alternate version, *Time Out Of Mind*)

Slow, somber, with all the tension implicit in the song's title brought to life, with organ dominating the other instruments, this is one of Bob Dylan's scariest vocals committed to disc. The lyrical changes reflect an anger that is not in any of the other versions, and Dylan's smoldering delivery makes it even more so.

This collection of music from the years 1989 to 2006 is comprised not only of long dreamed of studio outtakes, but several performances of Dylan in concert, as well as documenting not only music from albums of that period but explorations in bluegrass and traditional folk music and blues.

Curiously enough, music is the topic that is often missing from the numerous books and thousands of articles written about Bob Dylan. Instead they dwell on whether he was the "voice of a generation," whether or not people booed at the Newport Folk Festival, or whether he would offer thoughts on the world situation. Rarely broached is the simple fact that throughout his career Bob Dylan has explored and continues to explore all facets of American roots-based as well as popular music.

When Bob Dylan began what is commonly referred to as the "Never Ending Tour" in 1988, in each set he included at least one traditional folk song. As the tour progressed the songs would change, some played often, some only once. This stopped for a while in '94, but started again in '95 and picked up with a vengeance in '99. By the mid-nineties, when the set lists for shows were posted on the Internet every night and a previously un-played song appeared, people would want to know what it was. Someone would inevitably have the source. Sometimes there would be more than one source. The result was that people would learn about music they wouldn't have known about otherwise, whether it was a Child ballad, the Carter Family, Reverend Gary Davis, or Johnny and Jack. As a friend told me recently, "I wouldn't have known about the Stanley Brothers if it wasn't for Bob Dylan." Simply by performing a song, Dylan accomplished what the purveyors of the sixties folk "revival" always

wanted, without the didacticism, and, because of the Internet, the result was world-wide. He was, as he said in the film *No Direction Home*, a “musical expeditionary.”

In the fall of 2000, he surprised audiences even further by delving into music that was if not quite jazz, certainly jazz and swing influenced. In Dublin, at the Point Depot, he debuted a dramatically rearranged “Tryin’ To Get To Heaven.” A couple of weeks later in Munster, he blew minds by pulling out his only previous excursion into anything remotely jazz, “If Dogs Run Free,” from the 1970 album *New Morning*. Exactly a month later in Bloomington, Indiana, he surprised audiences by including in the eight-song encore a Sons of the Pioneers song, “Blue Bonnet Girl,” that had shades of Western Swing. The previous spring, Dylan had toured with Western Swing band, Asleep At The Wheel, who for 40 years have been championing the music of Bob Wills. Six years later Wills would be one of the most played artists on Dylan’s XM Satellite radio show, *Theme Time Radio Hour*. It was obvious Dylan was up to something, and the answer was on his next album, “*Love And Theft*”, which was on one level – and with Bob Dylan there are always several levels – an exploration of specific American music genres. This was continued five years later to some degree on *Modern Times*.

This collection covers the period from *Oh Mercy* through *Modern Times*, and includes several outtakes from the sessions for *Oh Mercy* as well as the sessions for *Time Out Of Mind*, and songs written for movie soundtracks. These are complemented by several live tracks. There are no outtakes from “*Love And Theft*”.

Several of the tracks provide insight into how songs take shape in the studio, as well as Dylan’s writing process. Often Dylan will have a line he wants to use and might try it in several songs before it finally finds a home. Sometimes that line can wait for years. This is nothing new. Early on, Dylan said that he’ll carry a song in his head for a long time before finally writing it. A song may also go through several arrangements before the decision on which one to use is made. Sometimes, as hardcore Dylan fans well know, that decision is never made, which is among the reasons *The Bootleg Series* exists. “He left the best song off the album” is a common sentiment among Dylan fans and one I’m sure that will echo when this collection is heard. There is no great or defining *why* behind any of this, except that a musician doesn’t hear his or her own work the same way those listening do. It could be how a line is phrased, an instrumental part doesn’t seem right, or that the feel doesn’t capture how the song was originally envisioned. Sometimes from a songwriters’ perspective the song may not live up to what they intended to

accomplish. Sometimes a song simply may not fit with the other songs on an album.

Hearing “Red River Shore” for the first time, I could not imagine where it would have fit on *Time Out Of Mind*. It is different from every other song on that album in feel, lyrics, and arrangement. Its inclusion would have altered the landscape of *Time Out Of Mind* considerably.

In [February of 1989](#), Dylan went to New Orleans to record *Oh Mercy* with producer Daniel Lanois. Dylan’s two previous studio albums lacked focus and cohesion. A sometimes strange mix of covers and originals, they were basically tracks culled together with various musicians from various sessions, and in the case of *Knocked Out Loaded* from various studios. The best Dylan albums feature him working with a core group of musicians where, once the sometimes elusive groove is found and the magic happens, it is maintained throughout the sessions. Lanois provided that core group of musicians and an environment conducive to creation by setting up a recording studio in a house where clocks and other extraneous factors weren’t a consideration. Bob Dylan’s extensive and eye-opening description of the sessions is in his book, *Chronicles Volume One*, and other accounts may be found in articles, interviews, and other books. All the accounts agree that the sessions didn’t always go smoothly and the songs and arrangements didn’t come easily. Dylan arrived in New Orleans only with a set of lyrics. The melodies and arrangements were to be discovered. Some songs were written during the sessions.

When *Oh Mercy* was released later that year, it was hailed as a return to form. I’d received an advance copy on cassette about a week before the album’s release. I remember calling a friend and telling him that the new Dylan album’s *really* good. He didn’t believe me. Later that night, I went to see some friends play at a local bar, and my friend was there. I said, “Come out to my car right now,” and played him “Ring Them Bells,” “Man In The Long Black Coat,” and “Most Of The Time.” His disbelief changed immediately.

However, what no one knew until the release of *Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3*, followed by subsequent bootlegs, was that several major songs were left off the album. Two of those songs were rerecorded for Dylan’s next album *Under The Red Sky*.

After *Under The Red Sky*, Dylan resumed his extensive touring schedule, stopping briefly that same year to record another album with The Traveling Wilburys. He would not record an album again for two years,

and with the exception of collaborating on “Heartland” with Willie Nelson, did not write another song for seven.

In 1992 and 1993, perhaps searching for his initial inspiration, Dylan recorded two albums of traditional folk and blues songs, *Good As I Been To You* and *World Gone Wrong*. *Good As I Been To You* was his first solo acoustic album in 28 years. Recording in his home studio, the production was minimal, the performances sometimes rough and unadorned.

January of 1997 found Dylan back in the studio, this time in Miami, with Daniel Lanois again producing. This time though, Dylan brought the musicians with him, including members of his touring band, drummer Jim Keltner, organist and accordionist Augie Meyers, keyboard player Jim Dickinson, and guitarists Duke Robillard and Bob Britt. Lanois, in addition to playing various guitars, brought in other musicians, drummer Brian Blades, percussionist Tony Mangurian, and slide guitar and dobro player Cindy Cashdollar.

After recording the album, Dylan returned to touring first in Japan, then in Canada and the U.S. Then at the end of May, in fact the beginning of Memorial Day weekend, came the startling news that Dylan had been hospitalized with a heart infection. I heard the news in my car leaving my day job, tuning to the all-news station to get the traffic report. I sat there in the parking lot numb for a few seconds, and went home to an answering machine crammed with messages and a similarly full inbox of e-mails. Dylan fans held their breath for a week until he was released from the hospital.

When *Time Out Of Mind* was released at the end of September, the songs were so dark that many people, not realizing when it was recorded, confused the illness with the album. On the Internet the discussions in the various Dylan forums started immediately: What does the title mean? Is it from Shakespeare? Is it from Warren Zevon? I always found it self-evident. In just about every song the protagonist is, well, going crazy. The light is too bright, or too dark, the room is too hot or too cold. He hears voices. Whatever the situation is, it's never right and far from comfortable.

Time Out Of Mind is dominated by the blues, with only four of its eleven songs being ballads. What separates the blues on *Time Out Of Mind* from the blues songs on previous albums is a conscious attempt to get the sound of the great blues records of the '50s. The blues has been a constant in Dylan's music throughout his career, and one could make a case for him being at heart a blues singer (while being many other things

of course). Dylan has always made his blues his own, and when he sings the blues it is without the affectations of many of his contemporaries, whether it's "Black Crow Blues" or "Obviously Five Believers," "From A Buick Six" or "Meet Me In The Morning," "Are You Ready" or "'Til I Fell In Love With You."

Right around the time of the album's release, various articles and interviews appeared. Jim Dickinson, naming "Girl From The Red River Shore," said (what else?), "They left the best song off the record." Descriptions of the sessions sounded like legendary Dylan studio chaos with each take being different than the one before or in a different key. I'd worked with steel guitarist Cindy Cashdollar who was a perfectionist in the studio and tried to imagine her in the situations I read about. I saw her backstage at an Asleep At The Wheel show in Atlantic City and asked her what the sessions were like. Expecting to hear a tale of misery, she surprised me by saying, "They were fine. Bob knew exactly what he wanted."

Bob Dylan told the *New York Times*, "Many of my records are more or less blueprints for the songs. This time I didn't want blueprints, I wanted the real thing. When the songs are done right they're done right, and that's it. They're written in stone when they're done right."

Within a year, the onstage arrangements of many of those songs had changed considerably.

In the songs included on this set for the first time, all kinds of surprises await. In the alternate versions of songs from previously released albums, whether live or in the studio, you may see them in a whole new light. If you care to dig deeper into the lyrics, you may find literary references that span the scope of time. If you follow the musical connections that were begun on "*Love And Theft*", and delved into even further on *Modern Times*, you'll find they cover the wide canvas of American popular music.

Together Through Life - Dancing with Dylan

If Bob Dylan's previous studio album, *Modern Times* was about (among other things) finding love or maybe just romance, in a world, where some sort of impending doom lurked waiting around the next corner, on the new, *Together Through Life*, he's decided, well there's nothing much you can do about it except sing the blues, and if you're going to sing the blues, then you might as well make it swing a little have a good time doing it.

The blues has been the one constant in Dylan's nearly five decades of musical adventures. It dominated his very first album and there's maybe two albums

that don't have a blues song in structure, and it's dominated every album since he returned to songwriting after a long layoff with *Time Out Of Mind*. And make no mistake about it, Bob Dylan can be a great blues singer, up there with the very best, when he wants to be.

Dylan's initial work (meaning the '60s) was so devastatingly brilliant – and to see why, all one has to do is compare his songs with similar songs by his contemporaries – that ever since he's been saddled with the impossible task of not only being Bob Dylan, but the myth of being Bob Dylan. And it is the myth that he's played with endlessly, like a cat with a mouse, doing everything he can to destroy it, yet holding on to it at the same time. Ultimately, every attempt at deflating who he was only ended up adding to the myth.

Lost in the myth, is that the music is what it's always been about for Bob Dylan. It's what drives him, it's his first love, and if the title of this album signifies anything, it's that. What makes Dylan fascinating and what's earned him his reputation as one of the greatest American artists is his absolute refusal to stand still. It's death to him. The meaning of, as well as the sound to his work is always transient. What comes in second, or maybe third behind the lyrics, and the myth is that seen as a whole, Dylan's work and maybe his greatest achievement has been an extensive exploration into American music and by extension American culture.

While much of Dylan's work in the studio and on-stage has been off the cuff, and whatever happens happens, in the past 15 years at least, he's been more consciously in search of a sound. Following the success of *Time Out Of Mind*, he decided he could achieve the sound he wanted on his own, for whatever reason using the name Jack Frost. (Those who pay attention to album credits, Jack Frost appeared on 1990's *Under The Red Sky*.)

Together Through Life is easily the best Jack Frost production yet. The sound is loud, bright, punchy and clear, with all the instruments coming through. The arrangements are thought out and definitive. (The arrangements will probably change once Dylan does these songs onstage, but that's another story.)

For the sessions Dylan used three members of his road band, longtime bassist Tony Garnier; drummer George Recile, and Donnie Herron who plays steel, guitar, banjo, mandolin, trumpet, and while not listed in the album credits, violin. Augmenting this are guitarist Mike Campell, of Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers, who also plays mandolin, and David Hidalgo of Los Lobos on accordion and guitar.

Hidalgo and Campbell's contributions give the album its punch and its spark, while Herron, much like Garth Hudson did in The Band, provides the texture. He's the glue holding it all together. After seven years playing hundreds of shows together, Garnier and Recile have become an extremely tight rhythm section. Whatever excesses Recile had when he first joined Dylan's band, where you wondered if a fill would end on time have been reigned in and careful

attention has been paid to Garnier's bass sound. The result is you can actually hear what he's doing and what an excellent player he actually is. Much has been made in the press as well as in the online interview at Dylan's official site of the album having a sound reminiscent of Chess and Sun Records. That's not entirely accurate, though on the blues songs, the bass in particular does have the Chess sound. While the blues dominate, the album crosses Dylan's usual wide range of stylistic genres – Hidalgo's accordion touches on not only Tex-Mex, but Zydeco, Cajun and polkas – the sound and feel of the album is cohesive throughout.

The songs are not necessarily hard hitting in impact, and frankly were written that way on purpose. Much has been made that all except one are a lyrical collaboration with Robert Hunter, best known as lyricist for the Grateful Dead. Ultimately it's not important, though I'm sure someone out there is busy trying to discern who wrote what line. These songs are meant to be taken as face value. While the usual references are there – it's a good idea to be well read to listen to Bob Dylan, along with having a good knowledge of film – these songs do not dive deep into the mystic. That said, they have a way of creeping back into your mind, almost haunting you in a way that makes you want to hear them again. Certain lines hit you at certain times, in fact they have a way of sneaking up on you, in a way that you end up thinking about what the line may really mean such as the title of the opening song, "Beyond Here Lies Nothing."

It's an album in which the landscape the songs are written against is as important as the songs themselves, and it's a shadowy, often menacing, sometimes violent landscape, the landscape of a fading America. That menace is found in Campbell's guitar, Hidalgo's accordion, and most of all in Dylan's voice.

Ongoing throughout this album, throughout life, is the search and more importantly the struggle to find love, but also friendship, in the belief that love and only love is the true sustaining force in life. Yes these songs are written, and sung with the full knowledge that love rarely lasts, and often the singer is left simply contemplating the shadows as night turns to morning. Dylan's great trick in this is that the past, present, future, and the desires, hopes, as well as loss and even regrets are all one.

Despite whatever bleakness lies in the lyrics, Dylan is having a great time singing this stuff. That of course is what the blues is about, rising above. He uses the increasingly gravelly remains of his voice to great effect. One of the best moments is near the end of "My Wife's Home Town" a rewrite of the Muddy Waters classic, "I Just Want To Make Love To You" (for which songwriter Willie Dixon is credited), where he alternates between phrasing like Muddy, and phrasing like Howlin' Wolf.

This isn't an album where you can pick one or two songs, and say they're the definitive track. If one could pick a song as sounding like arrangement-wise, the typical Bob Dylan song, that would be, "I Feel A Change Comin' On," much the

way “Mississippi” was on “Love And Theft.” The melody, one of the nicest he’s come up with awhile has echoes of his work with The Band. More accurately it’s the sound one always hoped would evolve from that collaboration. All the songs have what is perhaps a deliberate familiarity to them. The difference this time is the music and the production is spot on. There’s not a note that’s out of place, though sometimes on “If You Ever Go To Houston,” the omnipresent accordion riff can be a bit much. At the same time, the way Hidalgo uses the accordion to recreate Little Walter’s Harmonica on “My Wife’s Home Town” is brilliant.

“Life Is Hard,” the song that initiated this album could be Dylan’s best attempt yet at writing a ’40s style ballad.

There’s been a tendency over the past decade to proclaim every Dylan album a masterpiece, which is unfortunate. At this time, I wouldn’t put it in that category. What it is, is a good, solid album of songs that have a way of growing on you, where the music, the sound, the feel and the groove, are just as important, if not more important than the lyrics. If there’s a problem with this group of songs, it’s that Dylan’s current style of writing songs, borrowing lines from old songs, whatever he happens to reading, and innumerable other sources rolling around in his mind, is starting to approach being formulaic and more about craftsmanship than inspiration. However, if there’s one thing I’ve learned in listening to Bob Dylan for most of my life, it’s that he never stays in the same place too long. I remember wondering when Nashville Skyline came out, if it was gonna be those kinds of songs for the rest of time, and ten years later having similar thoughts during the “gospel period.” That said, Together Through Life is the first Dylan album, you can put on and dance through the whole thing, and maybe that’s good enough for now.

It’s a Bob Christmas for Halloween

There are many ways to view or react Bob Dylan’s decision to record a Christmas album, and probably all of them make sense. I always figured he’d do one eventually and when the album was announced several weeks ago, my initial reaction was, why now? I would’ve expected it about 28 years ago, but after 46 years of following Dylan, I learned long ago that predicting anything he’s going to do is futile.

Shortly after the announcement of the album, it was also announced the album, [Christmas In The Heart](#), would be a benefit, Dylan would be donating all royalties present and future to three organizations that combat world hunger, Feeding America in the United States; Crisis, in Great Britain; and the United Nations’ World Hunger Program.

It’s important to remember that just about every artist with a recording contract, and of many musical genres has recorded a Christmas album at some point, and if they haven’t done a Christmas album, they’ve done a Christmas song of some kind, and this includes musicians as diverse as Joan Baez, John Fahey and Asleep At The Wheel. It’s certainly a grand American (if not worldwide) pop music tradition. And Bob Dylan,

despite whatever mantels have been hung on him, has increasingly demonstrated he's an artist in the great American tradition.

Singing Christmas songs can be fun. I learned that a long time ago, when I attended a progressive private school in the Philly suburbs, and we had learn a bunch of Christmas songs for a school show. Singing those rather intricate harmonies right beside me was one person who would go on to found and lead America's great Western Swing revival band, and another who would write and produce a major TV show and some movies as well. None of us were Christians, though other kids in the class were. But my memory of it, after getting past the initial groans and grumbling, was that it was fun. (For the same presentation, I was also picked to play Santa Claus for all the kids in nursery school and kindergarten, even though I was one of the shortest and skinniest kids in the class, but that's another story.)

A couple of weeks ago, Amazon's UK site – probably wrongly, since they were quickly removed – posted sound clips of the album. The reaction in the online Dylan community, which consists of innumerable discussion forums was pretty much a collective Yikes!

My own response to the clips was Self Portrait Revisited. Another friend suggested that perhaps Dylan was getting too comfortable with a decade of good reviews and hit, often number one albums, and had to do something to shake things up. However before the clips appeared, another friend, author, CP Lee, who has written two books on Dylan wrote me that he considered it “Dylan's greatest master stroke. As he gets older you can see little lumps of the 1950s chrysalising/forming around him.”

Some of the Amazon clips, especially the ones with total white bread sounding backup vocals suggested schlock of the highest order, and generic instrumental backing. However, those clips, for whatever reason were ultimately deceptive.

On the album, Dylan is backed by three members of his regular touring band, bassist, Tony Garnier, drummer George Recili, Donnie Heron, on steel, trumpet, mandolin, violin and trumpet, and David Hidalgo returning on guitar, accordion, mandolin, and violin, as well as Patrick Warren on keyboards and celeste, and a crew of background singers, including the duo, The Ditty Bops. Dylan as usual, is guitar, electric piano and harp.

The arrangements are perhaps the most carefully crafted of any album Dylan has released. Everything is deliberate. The backup vocal parts, complete with rounds, were absolutely thought out. The playing is uniformly excellent, with not a misplaced note, with Donnie Herron, again showing why he is one of the most valuable members of Dylan's band, something that isn't necessarily apparent at Dylan's live performances, where his work is often buried in the sound mix.

For the song selection Dylan chose the route (for the most part) right down the middle of the road, mixing classic carols with pop music Christmas songs. There are of course Christmas songs in every genre, traditional folk, bluegrass, blues and rock and roll. Dylan may have had Minnesota in mind, but it doesn't matter. In keeping with his last two albums, and in keeping with an onstage exploration of American music that's been happening at his concerts in various forms and at various times, during the past 15 years, if not his entire career, that he chose this route makes total sense. That said, (not that I'm ever going to tell Bob Dylan what to do), there's a couple of songs I would

have liked to hear him sing. Leadbelly has a cool song called, "Christmas Is Coming," and I think he could have done a great job on "Go Tell It On The Mountain," and I can also imagine a fairly rocking, "Children, Go Where I Send Thee."

What makes Christmas In The Heart perhaps the most unique Christmas album ever is that Dylan's voice has been shot for a while now. He's not quite in Tom Waits territory, but close, perhaps with as another friend suggested, a touch of Jimmy Durante. I once wrote he was a young man with an old man's voice. He is now that older man, and the years of going after the sound of the great old blues and country singers, the years of singing with a different voice on every album, not to mention probably a million or more cigarettes have take their toll. But like all great singers – and Dylan is a great singer – he's found ways to work within his limitations. So against this very smooth, often exquisite backing, you have this singer with this extremely rough voice. There are times, when you think he's never sounded more tender, or more gentle. There are times you can imagine him playing with his grandkids, and there are times where he's never sounded more sincere. In other words, he's really singing, and some of these melodies are the most demanding and challenging he's ever done. The tension, and there's never been a Bob Dylan album without some sort of tension, especially on the first couple of listens is whether he's going to hit what he's going for, and he usually does. It may be some of the roughest note hitting you've ever heard, but he does get there.

This is an album where mentioning standouts doesn't matter. Dylan sounds most at home for obvious reasons on "The Christmas Blues." The most fun track is a dead on cover of Brave Combo's polka rendition of, "Must Be Santa." Yes, that's right, polka! Complete with accordion, and it's a riot. Everyone sounds like they're on the verge of cracking up singing it too. This of course brought a worldwide collective WHAAAT!!!!!!!??? among Dylan fans when the sound clip emerged. There's also the Hawaiian, "Christmas Island," where you half expect Leon Redbone to drop in for a guest verse at any moment. Dylan is at his most gentle on "Little Drummer Boy," a song I always knew that if he ever did a Christmas album, he would do. Both "Winter Wonderland" and "The Christmas Song," have touches of western swing in the arrangements. Unfortunately, they don't have original song credits, so I don't know if Herron is doubling on fiddle and steel, or if the fiddle is David Hidalgo.

The traditional carols are the ones I keep going back to. "O' Come All Ye Faithful" has an arrangement that is close to baroque music with trumpet and bowed string bass, and incredibly enough, Dylan sings the first verse in Latin, which is something I never thought possible.

So yeah, Bob Dylan made a Christmas album, a real one. And because it's Bob Dylan, is all the baggage that goes with Bob Dylan, the absurdity of it, and also the realness of it. And one could make a good case for it being another exploration of American music, 'cause it is that. And there's a bit of sly humor it as well. It may be the craziest thing he's ever done in a long list of fairly crazy things, or it could be as CP Lee said, "His greatest master stroke." And yep, it will have its detractors. But there's some great playing, and a lot of genuine real feeling. So while the rest of the world may be going to hell, be of good cheer.

Bob Dylan and America

Historian, professor and writer Sean Wilentz' new book *Bob Dylan in America* is neither biography or critical assessment though it is a bit of both. Comprised largely of previously written though updated articles, the book isn't so much about Dylan as it is about some of his influences, and how Dylan fits into the great scheme of American music.

In a way that is both refreshing and strange, Wilentz doesn't begin his book with the usual kid in Minnesota, goes to James Dean movies, escapes to Minneapolis, discovers Woody Guthrie, and hitchhikes east to New York story. Instead he starts with a chapter on Aaron Copland. The impetus for this was Dylan using Copland as the introductory music to his concerts in the early 2000s. However, this provides a different view of the New York City Dylan would arrive in, than the usual Greenwich Village folk scene and beats saga. More importantly, Wilentz manages to tie Copland and the folk scene together, and there are parallels both culturally and politically.

Wilentz clearly loves and enjoys history and research, and as a result the book is loaded with back stories, not only on people, but songs, the people in songs, and labor and political movements. In the Copland chapter particularly, there are times the writing comes off as a little too professorial, but if you make it through the tedious portions, Wilentz does resolve the points he is making.

Wilentz' historian training provides an advantage over many writers of books on popular musicians in that he checks his facts. Having read many books on Dylan and other musicians, I'll often see without trying too hard glaring errors on things that are easily checkable. When that happens, I then start wondering what else is wrong. That Wilentz is also knowledgeable about music itself, the various genres and what's behind those genres gives this book extra weight.

While the chapters are in linear fashion time-wise, within the chapters, Wilentz will often jump back to earlier songs, recordings and events. The second chapter is about the Beats and Dylan's relationship with Allen Ginsberg, and in doing so also described the Greenwich Village Dylan arrived at in 1961. Wilentz' family ran the Eighth Street Bookshop in the Village, which was one of the great bookstores, and his father edited *The Beat Scene*, an anthology of beat poetry that just so happens to be one of the first books I can recall buying on my own, more than likely at that store. Dylan and Ginsberg first met at a party above the store. While the chapter gets briefly bogged down in the talking about the intellectual warring between the Beats and other writers, the chapter was enticing enough to make me think about if there was correspondence between Dylan and Ginsberg, it could be a potentially great book.

Wilentz then moves onto Dylan's 1964 Halloween concert at New York's Philharmonic Hall. The chapter is an updated and in my view improved version

of the liner notes he wrote for the official release of that concert, Bootleg Series 6, Live '64. I attended that show, and was the same age as Wilentz. It was his first Dylan concert, my second, and for all I know he could've been sitting near me in the balcony. Wilentz recognizes the importance of that show – the official release a few years ago is often maligned by never satisfied Dylan fan on various internet Dylan forums – and it was important for several reasons. This was at a time that Dylan stopped playing clubs and did not tour constantly the way he does now. His concerts were basically once a year events. Back then one of the reasons to see Dylan was to see what new songs he would sing. A couple of months before the show, in *Sing Out! Magazine*, editor Irwin Silber wrote “An Open Letter to Bob Dylan,” castigating him for moving away from protest songs. At that point in time, *Sing Out!* was pretty much the Bible of Folk Music, and one of the few ways kids like me had of getting any news of Dylan and other folk musicians. So I went to that concert wondering if Dylan was going to sing “A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall” or “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll.” He did. He also introduced to New York – and at the time New York was his home base and he was a hero to a certain group of people, several new songs, including “Mr. Tambourine Man,” “It's Alright Ma,” and “Gates of Eden,” songs that wouldn't appear on record for another five or six months. He also interacted with the audience in a way he hasn't done since. Similar interaction may have happened on subsequent shows that fall, but at his next New York City appearance the following summer, things would be way different.

The book then moves on to the Blonde On Blonde sessions, which is one of the key chapters and one of the primary reasons Dylan fans will want this book. Wilentz was given access to one of the great holy grails, the outtakes from the Nashville sessions. Early recordings from New York, with Dylan's touring band, The Hawks, plus some other musicians such as Al Kooper have been bootlegged for years. But with the exception of “Memphis Blues Again,” on the *No Direction Home* soundtrack, nothing else has been released. Only one song from the New York sessions, “One of Us Must Know” appeared on the album. Wilentz also interviewed some of the musicians, most notably multi-instrumentalist Charlie McCoy, and provides the most in depth look to date at what went down on what many consider to be Dylan's greatest album.

The book then jumps ahead almost a decade to the Rolling Thunder Revue, but Wilentz also uses that chapter to look back, sometimes briefly, sometimes in depth at The Basement Tapes, Tour '74, *Blood On The Tracks*, and Dylan's time studying with painter Norman Raebe, and Dylan's not exactly historically accurate songs about George Jackson, Rueben Hurricane Carter, and Joey Gallo, as well as Dylan's critically maligned film, *Renaldo & Clara*, and its connection to the film *Children of Paradise*. Unfortunately, Wilentz apparently saw a truncated version of the Revue at a matinee performance, and what's missing from his account is the feel of the entire show, which was a real revue, with just about every musician getting a turn at the mic, and several segments that wound up being (at the show I saw) a four hour extravaganza. I would take exception to Wilentz calling it “a new variation on the thin wild mercury sound,” Dylan's

description of the Blonde on Blonde sound. I think it was more like the guitars crashing autumn gypsy carnival sound, but that's a minor quibble.

Then Wilentz jumps ahead seven years to one of Dylan's great works of the '80s, though it wasn't legitimately released until the '90s, the song "Blind Willie McTell," originally recorded for the album *Infidels*, and one of Dylan's greatest songs period. While acknowledging the song might not be about Blind Willie McTell – one of the great bluesmen and songsters – at all, he then goes into a long, at times fascinating history of McTell, somehow managing to jump back to Dylan's gospel records and forward again.

This method is repeated as Wilentz jumps ahead another decade to two songs from Dylan's *World Gone Wrong* album which was old ballads and blues songs. In the chapter on "Delia," you get the entire history of not only of Delia, but how the song evolved into many different forms and many of the singers who sang it, and in the somewhat shorter chapter on "Lone Pilgrim," we're treated to the history of Sacred Harp singing. In employing this method of going back and forth across time, much like Dylan does in some of his songs, Wilentz does manage to cover large portions of Dylan's career.

While the book covers Dylan right up to the release of his Christmas album a year ago, the remaining key chapter is the one on "Love And Theft," an album I consider to be one of the most important and complex of his later works. In the years preceding the album, Dylan had been dropping various clues into his concerts about what he was up to by not only playing his own songs, but exploring the works of other artists and genres from Bluegrass, Country and Blues to Western Swing, and also by telling really bad jokes at his concert. All of that and much more came together on the album which was at once a huge exploration into American music, autobiographical, and commentary. The album was loaded with references lyrical and musical and that's understating it. Astute Dylan fans immediately picked up the references and on a site set up by a very knowledgeable Dylan fan from Poland, the lyrics were printed and annotated with various people contributing references as they discovered them. By sheer coincidence, the album was released on September 11, 2001, which confused the issue as certain lines could be construed to forecast the events of that day. "Love And Theft" was indeed a concept album, and it is my belief the references, the borrowing of lines and melodies were meant to be discovered by those who chose to look for them. Wilentz goes into the references, the various controversies surround this cut and paste style of writing which continued not only on Dylan's next two original albums, but his book *Chronicles* as well, and explores the various reactions not only in the media but on the internet as well.

Not always an easy read, *Bob Dylan in America* is one of the more interesting books on Dylan because Wilentz places him in not the usual voice a generation bullshit context, rarely goes into his personal life and concentrates mainly on Dylan's art and what's behind it, and never indulges in the songs as some secret code to be interpreted. While I could probably have a good time arguing with

him on a bunch of different ultimately minor points, in the end, Wilentz does what a good teacher is supposed to do, he challenges you to think.

Tempest - Dylan's Sly Trip to Hell on Earth

Tempest is Bob Dylan's 34th studio album. He has now been recording for half a century and if this album is an indication, he has no intention of slowing down. It is an album that is like everything he's ever done and at the same time like nothing he's ever done. It takes quite a bit of magic to pull that off, and Dylan is a magician and a trickster and it is this unpredictability that has kept his fans, no matter when they came in along the journey entranced. The nods to the past on this album are mostly musical and he continues his exploration of the various genres that make up American music, whether it's blues, swing, rock and roll, country and folk music.

In the '60s and the '70s, once he started recording with other musicians, Dylan's records were a kind of inspired chaos. Musicians would gather in a studio, usually great ones, he'd start playing, the tapes would roll and whatever happened happened. And this went on with a couple of exceptions depending on who was producing for the next 30 years. This started to change with *Time Out Of Mind* and definitely with *"Love And Theft"*, an album that among many other things was also an exploration of musical styles and genres.

On *Tempest*, there is not a note out of place. Every arrangement, every instrument used, and how they were used and what is played has clearly been thought out. And this extends to how the album was recorded and mixed, the microphone placement and most importantly, how the songs would be sung.

And speaking of singing, Dylan hasn't sounded this energized and committed in 11 years. His voice may be in shards and shreds, but the force is back. There are times when it's astoundingly sweet and times when it's right in your face and it's not necessarily pleasant, and it's not meant to be pleasant. The album *The Times They Are A-Changin'* wasn't supposed to be pleasant either.

For those who maybe were hoping for some kind of rallying cry on the raging American insanity and the apparent worldwide despair so prevalent in the 21st Century, look elsewhere. Ever since Dylan abandoned the topical song game two years into his career, he's always gone for the bigger, deeper and broader picture. At the same time, this is not to say that connections cannot be made.

Tempest is a collection of songs written and sung in various ways against a variety of musical backgrounds in which the people in those songs continually do horrible things to each other, and there is no relief and no escape. It is

relentless. And when it's not being pounded in by the words, it's pounded in by the music. Death appears in every song, and it is cold, brutal and unforgiving. There is also very little reason to think that the "I" in any of the songs (with the possible exception of the closing track) is Dylan himself. There are stories told by a master storyteller, and ballads sung by the greatest of all ballad singers. The opening song "Duquesne Whistle" starts with this cool little '30s intro with guitar, steel and piano before the drums kick it into Western Swing mode with Tony Garnier's double bass dominant in the mix propelling the song. It's at once a train song and love song, except the train is on it's final run, and the lyrics are full of one, two punches:

Can't you hear that Duquesne Whistle blowin'?
Blowin' like the sky's gonna blow apart
You're the only thing alive that keeps me going
You're like a time bomb in my heart

From there the music moves forward right into the heart of the '50s and even early '60s with a rock and roll ballad, "Soon After Midnight," where Donnie Herron's pedal steel stands out. Dylan sings so gently, carefully and sweetly that you're almost startled by how good he sounds. The first time I heard it, I could imagine Otis Redding singing it. At first you think, okay a nice, even amusing, even charming rock and roll ballad, but then all of a sudden, "Charlot's a harlot, dresses in scarlet," and in the next verse:

They chirp and they chatter What does it matter? They lie and dine in their blood
Two timing Slim Who's every heard of him? I'll drag his corpse through the mud

"Narrow Way" a bluesy rocker has this insistent guitar riff that never lets up. The guitar tone is so downright nasty it's like a jackhammer that is suddenly breaking the sidewalk up outside your window at 6 in the morning. It is one of the craziest guitar riffs I've ever heard played over an equally raunchy slide deeper in the mix. The lyrics alternate from place to place and subject to subject, starting with a person on the song walking across the desert until he's in his right mind, but then the second verse shifts to:

Ever since the British, burned the White House down There's a bleeding wound,
in the heart of town I saw you drinking, from an empty cup I saw you buried, and
I saw you dug up

And then a couple of verses later:

We looted and we plundered, on distant shores Why is my share not equal to
yours? Your father left you, your mother too. Even death has washed its hands
of you.

For 11 verses the song rambles between men and women, friendship and betrayal, and past and present the guitar which conjures up visions of Howlin'

Wolf gone mad running through some shiny towering corporate complex pounds your brain.

This is followed by “Long And Wasted Years,” a talking song with a celestial descending riff, where again pedal steel guitarist Donnie Herron shines. It would be easy to say it picks up where “Brownsville Girl” left off a couple of decades later, and it also echoes another great talking song, the unreleased Basement Tapes song, “Sign On The Cross,” and there are times on this that somehow Dylan manages to pull out for a few seconds that Basement Tapes voice. Throughout the song Dylan quotes a variety of sources, old blues, old rock and roll, Tennessee Williams. But the song also serves as an interlude to catch your breath.

“Pay In Blood” is an absolute killer track and a real return to rock and roll, recalling mid-’70s Stones and Warren Zevon with a bit of Motown thrown in. Dylan’s voice is at its most gravelly and he’s right at the mic literally rubbing it right in your face with an attitude that says I don’t give a damn, you are going to hear this, and I’m going to shout it like I’ve never shouted before. It is the audio equivalent of his 1976 TV special Hard Rain where the attitude clearly was okay, you want to see me, I am going to push close-ups of my face right into your living room. Each verse has a bridge part that is totally evil and totally intense, and it’s the combination of the music, the structure of the music, and Dylan’s voice that doubles the intensity. It is quite possibly the most on-purpose and determined vocal he’s ever done. If there’s a song on this album about now, “Night after night, day after day/They strip your useless hopes away,” “Pay In Blood is it, a song of total betrayal and rage at that betrayal.

I’m drenched in the light that shines from the sun
I could stone you to death for the wrongs that you done

And later:

I’ve been through hell, what good did it do? You bastard, I’m supposed to respect you? I’ll give you justice, I’ll fatten your purse Show me your moral virtue first
Any words I write cannot do the song and this performance of this song justice.
It is one of the most brilliant things he’s done.

Dylan then heads South and back to his musical starting point for “Scarlet Town.” A ballad, an ancient ballad, one that crossed ocean – or did it? This is spooky Dylan territory and when he’s at his best. The music, a repeating three note guitar line that sets the rhythm a mandolin, a banjo, a fiddle, way in the background, a piano, the bass and drums contributing but never intruding.

The song counters each vision of what initially seems like a country town paradise with a description of what can only be hell. The song spans time and consciousness, past, present, future and some murky area between all of them. It is a place where “Help comes, but it comes too late,” and “All human forms seems glorified.”

"Early Roman Kings" takes Bo Diddley's "I'm A Man" (or if you choose Muddy Waters' rewrite "Mannish Boy" – both are really rewrites of Willie Dixon's "Hoochie Coochie Man") and by going backwards in history (maybe) brings it up to date. The first song from *Tempest* released on the Internet, the initial reaction of a lot of people myself included was what, another obvious blues song? However, in the context of the entire album and perfectly placed after "Scarlet Town," it makes total sense. With David Hidalgo's accordion providing what usually would be a harmonica part it soon becomes clear that the early Roman kings wearing "sharkskin suits" may not be back in Rome at all:

They're peddlers and they're meddlers
They buy and they sell
They destroyed your city
They'll destroy you as well
They're lecherous and treacherous
Hell-bent for leather
Each of 'em bigger
Than all of them put together

Dylan then shifts easily from Chicago (or is it Detroit?) to the Appalachian Mountains (or is it the forests of Old England) for another ballad "Tin Angel." Borrowing characters and part of the story from the ballad "Gypsy Davey," (or its variant "Blackjack Davey"), for 28 verses in a bizarre combination of ancient and modern ballad writing set against a repetitive figure that one could imagine Dock Boggs playing, it's a story of a love triangle that ends in murder and suicide with all three dead. It is written in such a way that all three of the major characters in the story, The Boss, The Lady, and Old Henry Lee (there also is a servant) speak often in the same verse with Dylan acting out each part and at the same time narrating the story. One would almost think the setting is the same as the original ballad, except the language alternates between ancient and modern and when the boss discovers his Lady and her lover, he cuts an electric wire. It may well be the strangest song Dylan has yet come up with.

This leads into the title track, a 45 verse epic ballad about the sinking of the Titanic in which no iceberg appears and a watchman (who may or may not be on the ship) is dreaming. The melody is simply gorgeous in fact jubilant with echoes of Celtic folk music with possibly two fiddles as Dylan describes the actions of various characters fictional and real as the ship sinks and chaos onboard ensues. For almost 14 minutes Dylan holds your attention and there are times when he sounds curiously joyous in a way that reminded me of the Newport '64 version of "Chimes of Freedom) available on video where he seems to delight in the words he's singing and that he wrote them. That could be the case here and if not, could it be the song isn't a about the Titanic at all?

Dylan concludes the album with a totally moving, and melodically beautiful part tribute part eulogy to John Lennon. Why now doesn't matter. On a personal note, I'm still upset about it more than three decades later. Quoting occasionally from various Lennon and Beatles songs, he tells various parts and aspects of Lennon's story and it's one of those things where you have to hear the way he sings the lines he quotes. However when he sings: "Now the city's gone dark, there is no more joy/They tore the heart right out, and cut it through the core," he totally captures the shock, the horror and most of all the loss of that cold December night that at times seems so long ago and somehow manages to seem like yesterday.

I am hesitant to compare *Tempest* to any of Dylan's other albums or indulge in the best since whatever. I keep thinking if it has a predecessor, it's his film *Masked And Anonymous*, not in the storyline or the characters, but more in the ambiance of the background where it always seemed dark even when it was light, the busses were 60 years old and poverty everywhere.

Dylan again wisely uses his road band along with David Hidalgo of Los Lobos on various instruments, and the album showcases their brilliance often in subtle ways as much as his. And if at times the musical repetition in some of the songs seems endless, it's for a reason. As with his best albums, it is so dark and so deep, it will require years of exploration. New revelations appear with each listen.

Something in these songs revitalized and energized Bob Dylan. While his vocal range is long gone, he's found new ways to use his powers. The songs, like some earlier songs at various stages are deceptively simple. In various online discussions about this album, I've seen the word sly used quite a few times, and there's no better description of the songs and the way he sings them. *Tempest* gives me every reason to think that Bob Dylan still has a few more tricks to pull out of his bag.

Shadows of Dylan Standard Time

Last week, an old friend who is a musician emailed me when news broke that Bob Dylan's new album *Shadows In The Night* is not original songs, but an album of standards that all happened to be recorded by Frank Sinatra. My friend wanted to know what my take was on Dylan performing material from what some refer to as "The Great American Songbook."

Those who have closely followed Dylan's 50 plus year career should not be surprised in the least by this development. Dylan has been toying around with standards since he recorded "Blue Moon" for *Self Portrait* in 1969. In 1985, at the first Farm Aid concert, Dylan sang "Lucky Old Sun" (which closes this album) and performed it several times the following year and occasionally after that. In

1987, Dylan performed a solo acoustic version of Gershwin's "Soon" at a tribute concert in Brooklyn. Dylan has occasionally tried his hand at other standards and Sinatra songs in the studio. Some have surfaced on bootlegs, some haven't. The song "Tomorrow Night" recorded on his album *Good As I Been To You* and recorded by numerous performers from blues singer Lonnie Johnson to Elvis Presley surely qualifies as a standard, and in 2000, Dylan rearranged his song "Trying To Get To Heaven" in a jazz flavored manner that was approaching standards territory as did various songs on the albums of original material he's released in this century. More to the point is the simple fact that during his career Dylan has tried his hand at virtually every type of American music, and this album is part of that musical expedition.

In an interview currently running not in *Rolling Stone* but in *AARP* magazine, Dylan says if he had to do it all over again, he would like to be a teacher. Sometimes Dylan can be a knucklehead and especially in this case because he already is one. One couldn't possibly estimate how many people decided to find out who Woody Guthrie was because of him or the Stanley Brothers when he sang their songs at concert after concert in the '90s or any of the other musicians he's covered, referenced in his lyrics or mentioned in interviews.

In choosing to do this material, Dylan followed a route similar to that of Willie Nelson on his *Stardust* album by using his own band occasionally augmented by a small subtle horn section. The songs were recorded live in the studio apparently in the order they appear on the album. There were no overdubs. The only microphone Dylan wanted to see was the one he was using to sing into. The arrangements are all based on Sinatra recordings, though some are a little shorter or less extravagant. It is the first Dylan album where he doesn't play an instrument and as such, given that this is an album of standards, there is no piano on the album. The use of percussion is minimal.

Deserving of a huge amount of credit is pedal steel guitarist Donnie Herron whose brilliant playing provides much of the ambiance and feel of the album, along with the bowed bass of Tony Garnier. The guitars of Charlie Sexton and Stu Kimball are often in the background, but some forward at just the right time on songs like "Some Enchanted Evening" and "Full Moon And Empty Arms." Overall this is ensemble playing and not about solos. Once Dylan starts singing, all talk of tribute albums or standards vanishes in the wind and it becomes a Bob Dylan album, and a fairly dark one at that. There are no fast songs, and all the songs, many of them from Sinatra's 1957 album, *Where Are You* are torch songs. Loss, heartbreak and loneliness are the dominant themes.

From the first track, "I'm A Fool To Want You," it becomes clear that this is some of the most committed singing Dylan has put on a recording in some time. It is Dylan without a mask. His voice is quiet, yet vulnerable and he never tries to phrase like Sinatra, emphasizing the words he cares about. The track is close to chilling in its intensity, leaving the listener no doubt Dylan has lived what he's singing about. And that feeling extends to every song on the album.

The album gets slightly upbeat with “The Night We Called It A Day,” which is followed by “Stay With Me (Main Theme From The Cardinal)” the surprise highlight of Dylan’s recent US tour.

By recording live without overdubs or earphones for that matter, Dylan is clearly going for emotion over musical perfection and yes there are times when he almost makes the note or his voice cracks, but all of that adds to the feel of the album and works to enhance tracks like “Autumn Leaves.” His rendition is downright spooky, you can practically feel the leaves falling in the early twilight, as the singer gazes out the window from a house where the emptiness rules everything.

Dylan sings “Why Try To Change Me Now” like it was written solely for him, with lines like “I’ve got some habits even I can’t explain” or “Why Can’t I Be More Conventional?” Even though the song is one of inherent sadness, Dylan’s voice suggests a sly smile behind the lyrics and as such it’s a standout. While “Some Enchanted Evening” is sung by other singers, with a tone of optimism, Dylan sings it as if it’s a dream that couldn’t possibly come true. The way he sings the last line, “Once you have found her, never let her go,” would not have been out of place on *Blood On The Tracks*.

“Full Moon And Empty Arms” was released on the internet on Dylan’s official site last spring and remains the perfect example of what Dylan is attempting and achieving – a feeling of dreamy mystery that pervades the entire album. “Where Are You” and “What’ll I Do” though very different in mood and feel both add to the impression that this is also a concept album about a man looking back at his life and wondering how he screwed up so many relationships.

Dylan concludes the album with “Lucky Old Sun,” which will stand with the best vocals he’s ever put on record. I can’t listen to it without playing it again. It’s the track where you suddenly realize who the person is who’s been singing for the past half hour and every incarnation, every voice of a half century suddenly flashes by. The track is simply magnificent.

While *Shadows In The Night* will no doubt have its detractors, in terms of feel, cohesiveness and intensity, it’s one of the best albums he’s released this century. Acutely aware that he was one of the contributors to knocking these songs off the charts, there is no doubt that he put a lot of thought into both the presentation and the performance and cares about this music deeply. Dylan has always been about music tradition, even when people thought he was breaking with it. In making this music sound vital, not like a relic, without the slightest hint of camp, he is clearly saying this too is part of the tradition. And while he’s aiming this towards his older fans, he’ll probably end up teaching some kids about Frank Sinatra, popular music and musical arrangements along the way.

Doing It His Way: Bob Dylan and the Great American Songbook Revisited

So on this craziest of years in American history, Bob Dylan probably wisely chooses to ignore it all and delve deeper into American popular music on his new album, *Fallen Angels*. Recorded at the same studio, with his band plus additional guitarist Dean Parks, Dylan again deserves credit for not doing this stuff with an orchestra and doing it his way.

Despite the title, *Fallen Angels* has a lighter feel and is seemingly more uptempo than its predecessor, *Shadows In The Night*. And while many of these songs are (again) associated with Frank Sinatra, most of them have been done by other singers as well, often in signature versions.

While *Fallen Angels* doesn't quite have the emotional resonance as "*Shadows*," it is more fun, even though ultimately the subject matter is really not all that different. The band steps out and swings more, with Donnie Herron playing viola in addition to pedal steel, and several songs feature long instrumentals, often opening the song. On the best songs, Dylan seems to be having fun with both the word play and the phrasing on songs like "*Skylark*" and "*Polka Dots and Moonbeams*," and the phrasing on these songs is quite a bit different than the folk, country and blues Dylan has excelled at for most of his career. The most adventurous of these songs both in performance and arrangement is "*That Old Black Magic*," which Dylan's been including in his concerts along with "*Melancholy Mood*," another standout that hovers around the mysterious territory of Dylan's originals. The album opens with "*Young At Heart*," and Dylan is old enough to sing it with conviction, while also enjoying the construction of the lyrics. And if one chooses to view this as performance art, then there's a bit of conceptual humor behind this track.

The most convincing track is the closer, "*Come Rain Or Come Shine*," where both the lyrics and music fit the roughness of Dylan's voice and tone of the song is familiar territory. It's not quite as majestic as "*Lucky Old Sun*" was on "*Shadows*," but it's close.

The best tracks such as "*Melancholy Mood*" have a way of echoing in your mind hours after you heard them, and listening to the album, I kept imagining a lot of the songs being used in the soundtrack of movies yet to be made.

Ultimately, *Fallen Angels* is for hardcore Dylan fans.

Bob Dylan: “Reaching Back for Yesterday”

In the past five months, Bob Dylan has released 39 discs of music, which is more than his studio albums combined, not counting the Bootleg Series and other compilations. Last November, Dylan released the 36 disc Live 1966 Recordings a rather astounding document of his world tour that year. It was a very good way to temporarily escape from the election results three days before its release. March 31st marks the release of Triplicate, Dylan’s third album of American standards which also is a three disc set.

Dylan kept his fans waiting for more than 30 years for a live 1966 show with the lone exception of an incredible version of “Just Like Tom Thumb’s Blues” recorded in Liverpool that was the B-side of “I Want You.” A few years later a mislabeled bootleg of the Manchester concert that year wrongly thought to be one of the London Royal Albert Hall concerts appeared. Over the years other concerts or parts of concerts surfaced.

Backing Dylan, then known as The Hawks, was the group that later would become The Band, minus drummer Levon Helm, who quit the tour late the previous year, Robbie Robertson, guitar, Rick Danko, bass, Richard Manuel, piano, and Garth Hudson on organ. Playing drums was Mickey Jones, who was working with Johnny Rivers and before that Trini Lopez. At that point in time the group was steeped in R&B, blues and rockabilly. An early indication of the sound they would achieve with Dylan blues singer John Hammond Jr’s *So Many Roads* recorded in 1964.

The shows were what Dylan’s management referred to as half and half, the first set, Dylan solo on acoustic, the second set electric. The set list was the same every night with the exception of an occasional “Positively Fourth Street.” The recordings for the most part are sound boards recorded by Richard Alderson, a sound engineer who built the system used on the tour. The London shows, Manchester, and parts of others were recorded by Columbia Records. One of the interesting things is noting the

adjustments Alderson would make each night, some to accommodate whatever hall they were performing in, and others based on listening to the previous shows. Sometimes these adjustments take place during the show and mid-song. So on some shows Manuel’s piano stands out more than others, or Danko’s bass is at the forefront. Not all the shows are complete, and there are a few songs that are incomplete, which gets a bit frustrating if you forget to look at the cover of the disc, and you’re thinking this is the greatest “Desolation Row” or “Visions Of Johanna” ever and all of a sudden it ends.

So why would someone want 36 shows of the same songs? The easy answer, in addition to the fact that these are some of Dylan’s all-time greatest performances of what well may be his greatest songs is that none of the shows

are the same especially in terms of feel. Some, especially the acoustic performances may be close, but there's always something different. For all of Dylan's supposed indifference to the audience, each night during the acoustic set where there was no booing or shouting, you can feel him gauging the audience trying to see how they'll react to what is to come. Both sets featured brand new songs from then then unreleased *Blonde On Blonde*, "Fourth Time Around," "Visions Of Johanna" and "Just Like A Woman" on the first set and "Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat" on the second set. As a whole, the concerts featured songs from all of Dylan's previous albums except for *Freewheelin'*. Three of those songs, a rewritten "Baby Let Me Follow You Down," "One Too Many Mornings" and "I Don't Believe You" were dramatically rocked up.

The vocals on the acoustic sets are often incredibly gentle punctuated by intense out there harmonica solos that go to another planet, especially on "Desolation Row" and "Mr. Tambourine Man." One the best of these is the Sheffield show where the "Tambourine Man" harp solo was featured in Dylan's rarely seen film, *Eat The Document*.

Each night the electric sets were a battle, particularly in England, where the cat calls and boos and slow claps seemed in increase on each stop of the tour, with Newcastle being one of the more contentious audiences. The response of Dylan and his band was to play louder and harder, with Dylan's onstage comments becoming increasingly sarcastic. For the most part, he saved his anger for the songs, especially "Ballad Of A Thin Man," where snarls out the lines in a manner that is deliciously vicious, often changing lines: "You know something is happening and it's happening to you, isn't it Mr. Jones?"

As for the music, Robbie Robertson and Garth Hudson never take the same solo twice! Sometimes they hit it more than others though on each version of "Thin Man," Hudson is never less than astounding, sometimes changing the sound of his organ entirely as he snakes around Dylan's lines and both Robertson and Hudson use their instruments to answer Dylan's lyrics.

On a technical note, Alderson's soundboards sound just as good if not better than the recordings the Columbia engineers did.

As Al Kooper told me in 1994 when I interviewed him in anticipation of the original Live 66 Bootleg Series, "What's really interesting is they're putting out the stuff from England from the '66 tour with the Hawks, and that's some of the greatest rock and roll ever made in the history of rock and roll and that will vindicate probably Dylan to this generation that has no idea why people think he's great. It's scary how good that stuff is."

51 years later and the same guy is still doing what he wants to, often to the consternation of his fans, exploring songs that were all recorded by Frank Sinatra. Many of the songs were also done by other singers, but the arrangements are based on Sinatra's.

Once again Dylan is using his band, minus guitarist Stu Kimball with the addition of session guitarist Dean Parks. There are more horns this time around, arranged and conducted by James Harper. The album was recorded live in the studio.

Each disc starts with an upbeat swinging number, though the majority of songs are slower ballads of longing and regret. The upbeat numbers are often fun, especially "Braggin'" (which reminds me of Bobby Darin, though he apparently never did it) and "The Best Is Yet To Come." "Braggin'" also has the funkiest guitar solo on the entire set.

Instrumentally it's fine, though on some of the slower ballads the arrangements and mood are at times too similar to the earlier releases, *Shadows Of The Night* and *Fallen Angels*.

The album is packaged like an old 78 rpm album, and each disc contains ten songs like early LPs, and in fact most country albums until Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, and Willie Nelson came along. For why three discs and ten songs, check out the interview by one-time *Musician* magazine editor Bill Flanagan on Dylan's web site.

I think Dylan genuinely likes these songs. They are what he grew up on, but there are several times on these recordings that you can tell he is getting off on the word play of the lyrics. Also some of the sentiments in these songs may express as he once wrote in one of his innumerable rewrites of "Tangled Up In Blue," "...the things I never learned to say."

A musician friend of mine named Mike Hansen has a different theory: "I feel like he is genuinely re-animating some of America's greatest treasures. I think he knows he killed the whole art form and I think these 50 songs are some kind of penance. But they are also a sort of proposal. Nothing has to sound like it did before, nothing, not his songs or anyone else's. Keys and tempos, the mood, the instrumentation, everything changed to suit the singer. I'm really proud of him!"

On one level, Dylan has always been in his own way part teacher. He's pretty much explored every genre of American music from traditional folk to rock and roll, blues, country and jazz. He knows that by simply performing or recording a song, a good portion of his audience is going to check out where it came from. I also think that Dylan knows in order to stay alive, he needs to keep challenging himself. These songs melodically and structurally are not the ballads and blues he sang for most of his life. Melodically, they are far more intricate.

For the most part he succeeds. The best of these songs have a way of coming back into your mind hours after you heard them. For me the standout is "Once Upon A Time," but it's followed closely by "As Time Goes By," "September Of My Years," "Sentimental Journey," and "It's Funny To Everyone But Me."

The Strange Sad Tale of Victor Maymudes

Victor Maymudes was Bob Dylan's road manager in the 1960s, and filled a similar role more than 20 years later from the mid-'80s to the mid-'90s. He was friend, possibly confidante, and chess partner.

Maymudes ended his relationship with Dylan in 1997, and three years later signed a book deal, and started recording his memoirs on tape. However he died suddenly of a stroke the following year leaving only the tapes, and very little on paper. More than a decade later his son Jacob decided to finish the book for him, perhaps in hopes of preserving his father's legacy but also to find out who the man was who was absent during much of his childhood. Initially Jacob announced his intentions by putting up a couple of the tapes on youtube that disappeared within a day. This was followed by an unsuccessful Kickstarter campaign. Somewhere along the line St. Martin's Press, the same publisher Maymudes originally signed with decided to publish the book.

I listened to a couple of those tapes on youtube and they were for the most part incomprehensible stoned ramblings where Maymudes' memory often clashed with the actual timeline of events.

Maymudes' parents were American Jewish Communists, who were born in Poland, moved to New York and eventually relocated to Los Angeles. At one point, his father was regional editor of the Yiddish paper, *The Morning Freiheit*. In 1955, Victor and Herb Cohen who a decade later would manage Frank Zappa, Tom Waits and several others opened the Unicorn Coffee shop in Los Angeles. This was Victor's entrance into the music business. After splitting with Cohen he would manage and book people like Ramblin' Jack Elliott, and beat poet/comic Hugh Romney (eventually known as Wavy Gravy). Elliott suggested he go to New York and meet Bob Dylan, which he did in 1961. Apparently he and Dylan had an instantaneous connection.

Rolling Stone and some of the less savory members of the British press have referred to this book as a tell all. There is very little in the book to keep even the most rabid Dylan fan salivating. After a brief introduction that delves into Victor's history, the book is edited transcriptions of Maymudes' tapes followed by his son commenting and occasionally adding to what went on.

One of the problems with the book is Maymudes' timeline of events isn't always accurate and at times doesn't add up. For instance he talks about producing Joan Baez' first major concert in 1962. According to Baez' official website her first national tour was in 1961. By 1962, she'd released two studio albums and a live album came out that year. Maymudes also claims that Dylan's manager Albert Grossman stole a Dylan concert Maymudes had booked in one the smaller halls at Carnegie Hall and handed it off to manager/promoter Harold Leventhal in 1962. If so, the show never happened, and if he's confusing it with the concert Israel G. Young of the Folklore Center store in Greenwich Village presented at

Carnegie Chapter Hall in 1961, we'll never know. Much later in the book Maymudes states that Dylan attended the Selma Alabama March in the spring of 1965. Didn't happen. Maymudes is confusing it with a 1963 voter registration rally in Greenwood Mississippi Dylan performed at along with Pete Seeger and Theo Bikel.

In 1964, Maymudes was hired as Dylan's road manager on a somewhat crazed concert tour across the US in Dylan's brand new Ford station wagon on which they were accompanied by singer Paul Clayton and oddly enough a journalist named Pete Karman. This trip which included a stop in Hazard, Kentucky to drop off clothing for striking miners and a not exactly successful visit to Carl Sandberg in North Carolina, has been written about in previous Dylan biographies. Even though this time it's a firsthand account, there is little new of interest added.

Dylan is basically presented as an extreme introvert, occasionally prone to flying into outbursts of rage over matters of privacy or when something doesn't meet his expectations. Maymudes casts himself as protector, creating environments where Dylan could write, decision maker and quick thinker, especially in terms of getting out of potentially sticky situations. During a vacation trip to Greece later in 1964, Maymudes would roam the countryside while Dylan stayed in his room writing what turned out to be his fourth album, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*. But even here, Maymudes memory is confused as he has the album being recorded in August 1964, the month it was released, when it was actually recorded in one long session two months before.

Maymudes apparently wasn't around in 1965, a pivotal year for Dylan, and the book does not address why. The result is there is no inside account of Dylan's move to rock and roll.

Maymudes was back for Dylan's explosive 1966 world tour with The Hawks (who would become The Band). However the only story about the tour (one of the craziest in the history of rock and roll) is when an unnamed roadie is busted for drugs in an unnamed country resulting in everyone's hotel room including Dylan's being searched. Maymudes spends a bit of time talking about this particular roadie was really good at attracting women for after the show. Maymudes was upset when Grossman fired the roadie and sent him back to the states. But there's nothing about the guys in the band, nothing about the booing and the controversy Dylan generated in every country he went to, and nothing about Dylan being totally wasted and drained by the end of the tour. Maymudes was apparently there when Dylan crashed his bike which he claims took place in Albert Grossman's driveway in Bearsville, New York. Whether Maymudes' account is more valid and any of the other accounts is hard to say. After an argument with Albert Grossman, Maymudes left Woodstock and headed to the west coast.

The next part of the book is about Maymudes' involvement in the Bohemian scene in and around Santa Fe, where he eventually entered into the construction and real estate business. At some point he accompanies Dennis Hopper to Peru

to scout locations for Hopper's doomed *The Last Movie*. Various famous people (Maymudes is an inveterate name dropper) including the Merry Pranksters, Allen Ginsberg and various actors and actresses come and go, but Maymudes fails to make the scene come alive.

There are a couple of brief encounters with Dylan during this time. In 1987, his marriage broken up, his attempts at developing real estate a failure, and on the brink of financial disaster, Maymudes asks Dylan for a job. Dylan, about to embark on a foreign tour with Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers hires him even though he had a full road crew. At this point, perhaps because these events are closer in Maymudes' memory, the book becomes a bit more vibrant. During this part there is a feeling of what traveling was like and at times being backstage was like. Maymudes convinced Dylan he should have his own tour bus and inadvertently something is revealed: Dylan was actually concerned about alienating the members of his band by having his own bus. Maymudes goes into great detail about how he found and designed the bus that there's a chapter (apparently actually written, not dictated) that was supposed to be from the point of view of the bus, except it's not. During this we find out that even Bob Dylan can get lost looking for hotels (was there no CB radio?), the bus breaks down, and other adventures. But again key things are missing. For instance on the '89 tour at the first two stops, a four nights at the Beacon in New York City, and two nights at the Tower Theater (just outside Philly), at the final show of each stand, Dylan did something he never did before or since. Taking an extended harp solo at the end of "Leopard-Skin Pillbox Hat," jumps into the audience, continues to play the harp, makes his way to a side door and out of the theater. To appreciate the impact of this, Dylan's band usually set up fairly far back on the stage. This book should have had the story behind it, but not a word.

Ultimately, there just isn't that much revealed about Bob Dylan that hasn't already been out there in one way or another. In describing the scene backstage at Dylan's 30th Anniversary tribute concert at Madison Square Garden, where there were innumerable heavy duty music stars, you get the impression that Dylan has so many people around him who think they know what he wants, that he never gets to do what he really wants.

While Jacob Maymudes' interjections are usually well-written and sometimes painfully honest as he discovers the good and bad sides of his father's personality, as well as his account being a teenager on tour briefly with Dylan, what Victor Maymudes needed was a writer who could draw the interesting (not necessarily scandalous) stories out of him and challenge him when his memory didn't jibe with facts. As close as Victor Maymudes was to Bob Dylan, if you read this book to find out what Bob Dylan thinks about anything, that answer remains as elusive as ever.

Learning to lead a band

The Never Ending Tour (NET) has been a tour of moments. Even though I've written probably close to 100 reviews of NET shows, for me a good part of the NET was Dylan learning how to lead a band for the first time. When he went on tour in '64 and '65 backed by Levon and The Hawks, they were musicians who pretty much knew how to do it with the songs that they did, it didn't work out that way first in the studio and then when he finally returned to the road in '74 they were with him again and they pretty much did the same thing, the same approach.

The next band he had after that was kind of the opposite, the Rolling Thunder band, which was this rag-tag ensemble of musicians from all over. But they somehow made it work. Later on, the gospel band, they were all pros and so they kind of knew what to do, so he didn't really have to actually lead the band because he had great musicians backing him that knew what to do and Tim Drummond and Jim Keltner were key to that. There are few better rhythm teams than Jim Keltner and Tim Drummond. One of the most interesting things about Dylan's so-called gospel period is that it was his true return to rock 'n' roll.

Then he did that weird European tour in 1984 with all European musicians and you can't say that's one of his great bands, because he doesn't like to rehearse, I mean he does rehearse but you know he's like 'however it gets played is how it happens'.

The next big tour after that was Tom Petty and that was another established band that was already happening. Mike Campbell and Benmont Tench are great musicians, but the Petty tour for the most part was one that looked great on paper, but not in execution. Whether this was due to Dylan (and there are some pretty funny stories from Petty about the rehearsals) or the Heartbreakers is hard to tell.

The Farm Aid appearance was terrific and when the tour was announced, I had high hopes, thinking well this could be the best band since The Band. It didn't turn out that way, it didn't come close. While there is the occasional good song or performance here and there, the four shows I saw on the '86 tour were among the most boring, most un-heartfelt, least intense and most mechanical of any Dylan shows I've seen. But a lot of it has to do with the Heartbreakers as well and not just Dylan's eccentricities in rehearsing (never doing a song the way way twice etc.).

I've seen Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers several times over many years (with and without Dylan) and they are one of the least spontaneous of any band I've ever seen and their shows come across as pre-packaged. It's a strange thing because they are excellent musicians, their interviews show their heart is in the

right place in terms of knowing about rock and roll, but it doesn't translate to the stage.

The Dead rehearsals were way better than the shows, and most importantly they reminded him of songs he'd written but forgotten. The downside of the Dead tour was leading to him thinking he was a lead guitarist, the beach ball atmosphere of Dead shows, but it was also sort of a strategic move on his part trying to attract and capitalize on the Dead audience.

When Dylan finally decided to drop the background singers and all that excess and go out with a little four-piece band, at first with G.E Smith, there was stuff to like and some interesting transitions happened like going right from Most of The Time into Watchtower. The acoustic stuff was great, but Smith plays pretty much the same thing on every song. He may know Pretty Peggy-O, but he doesn't know what to do with it. I believe that was the only time it was just Bob with another guitar player with the exception of Bruce Langhorne on the Les Crane show. The thing I dug about Robbie (and Bloomfield too) was Robbie would respond to the lyrics. I never got the feeling G.E was responding to the lyrics. Yeah he can play fast and is technically proficient, but he has zero taste, no sense of tone, plays the same fucking thing no matter what the song. When G.E left that was when Dylan really had to take charge and lead things for the first time. The only problem was he'd decided he was a lead guitar player, which he wasn't, so it took a really long time for that stuff to gel. To me it gelled at certain points along the way, but it was never as great as it could have been.

When Larry Campbell finally came on board, (and I barely knew about him before that), I was like FINALLY, a real lead player, one who plays country on the country stuff and blues on the blues stuff. And what made him interesting and special was he could play a mess of instruments. One of the cool things Larry Campbell did was bring back Bob's finger-picking parts (well... not exactly, but not all that far either) on some of those old songs. Bob has been known to occasionally not use a flat-pick. His thing in concert is an energy thing and you can get that energy thing happening a lot easier with a flat-pick if that's the way you usually play. Now this isn't to say there aren't guitar players who finger-pick and get that same thing happening because there's plenty from Doc Watson to the (late) Rev. Gary Davis to John Hammond Jr., to name just a few.

I remember going to a show after Larry Campbell joined when Dylan toured with Van Morrison. Dylan opened the show but Van's band was so much tighter and I thought to do this show he really needs The Band behind him because there was such a difference in the two bands and how tight they were and it wasn't that Dylan's band wasn't tight, it just didn't have the same force that Van's band did.

So a large part of the Never Ending Tour - despite some of my reviews - was that it took him a really long time to really take charge of the band to get it to where he wanted, not that I always agreed with his moves and what he did with certain songs. The whole thing about having two really great guitar players there and he

would take the solos, was just ridiculous, it wasn't that he couldn't play guitar, because he can, but he's not a lead player. I call it search and destroy and when I do I like to stick a little copyright symbol next to it. Basically he had to learn how to lead a band and I don't think he got there till '99 or till Love And Theft.

Love And Theft stayed in my CD player for 6 months if not longer and I considered it in a lot of ways in a sense to be his most autobiographical record, like those lines in Honest With Me like he never wanted to go back to his hometown and his parents advice was still oozing out of his ears, I felt like that was really him. A lot of people were like 'why is he doing Honest With Me again?' and I think he was doing it because of those lines. I also don't view Love and Theft and Modern Times as a pair. I also don't think Dylan's written a truly great song, meaning from his heart and his gut since Love And Theft. I don't feel inclined to sing any of them, and the ones I did feel inclined to sing didn't stay with me very long.

The albums after Love and Theft he kind of stopped writing from deep within and one of the ways I know that is that even the songs on Love And Theft, as a performer myself I didn't even really want to sing them - some of them were too hard to learn - and even if I did learn them they didn't stay with me very long. After that, there were times he was trying, but he really wasn't getting there. Workingman's Blues on one level is a beautiful song but it doesn't quite get where he wants it to go. And later I learned Pay in Blood and I did it once and had no desire to do it again.

Maybe if I went back and listened to those records again they'd hit me in a different way sometimes that happens, but, the one thing was he was definitely concentrating on the music aspect of things, from getting the band to be what he wanted it to do, of course it was always different in concert and you know the bands changed. For a long time they were doing this thing where he'd play a riff on piano and Donnie Herron would be watching him intently, echo that riff and pass it on to the band and the band would riff on whatever that riff was for a while, but these days Donnie Herron is not watching him so intently anymore. In 2018 it was taking sometimes known and more often obscure rock n roll riffs whether its forms of surf music, the beach boys or some old rockabilly guy and putting his songs to that. It doesn't always work, it's fun in concert but it doesn't always musically work and because in a lot of songs eventually he'd return to his original way of doing it - sort of. Like It Ain't Me Babe, he's done it in like a thousand arrangements.

Dylan went through periods, he went through a big bluegrass period - actually a Stanley brothers period more than any other bluegrass people and Johnny and Jack and people like that and then he started moving towards Western Swing, although he never completely got there. He sort of went in the opposite direction and all of that eventually led to the Sinatra stuff - although that wasn't till ten years later.

It's become apparent that what he's really into is exploring American Music, but also that the cut and paste method has overtaken his writing, and how the great quotable lines are not necessarily great quotable Bob Dylan lines because he copped them from somewhere else.

Somewhere we learned from Tell Tale Signs that a lot of songs - and even more lines - he'd had for a long time and he was trying them out in various places until he found a home for them. One of the most important things about the Bootleg Series is that it reveals in many ways the way Dylan writes, how once he finds a line he likes, he will try that line out in a bunch of places until it finally finds a home. And he never stopped doing that. While Tempest showed some signs of getting away from cut and paste, there's an uninviting nasty edge to many of the songs ultimately reaching the conclusion that Dylan hasn't been able to (or maybe doesn't want to) connect with that place deep within (in terms of his original songs) since Time Out Of Mind and some of the songs on Love And Theft.

The Nobel and the song that will outlast him

More than 20 years ago I decided that if there's any Bob Dylan song that will go down in history as poetry, if any song will outlast him and stand the test of time it's A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall, a song that becomes more true and more scary every year. It's an apocalyptic vision. It's not about love and compassion, that's for sure.

Poetically it is amazing and I've never heard a version by Bob I didn't like. One of the more interesting versions Bob did is from the first Rolling Thunder tour where he rocked it up using a speeded up version of the "Hoochie Coochie Man" blues riff before each line in the verse. It totally blew me away. The Concert for Bangladesh version is also incredible and quite possibly the standout of that song for me. The one done with the orchestra in Japan in 1994 ain't bad either.

In the far distant future when Dylan's songs are studied, I am willing to bet that this will be one of the major songs under contention.

When Patti Smith announced she would sing the song at the Nobel ceremony, I thought if any singer will bring out the poetry and the intensity of that song, it's her. When I watched the clip, I quickly realized on the third line that she didn't learn the song. And considering the last line of the song, I was truly astounded. What went wrong? I don't know, except I don't think she really knew the song. It wasn't about showing humanity, it wasn't about singing with soul, it was about paying tribute and simply knowing your song well before you start singing at an awards ceremony that was quite controversial to begin with.

For years Dylan fans circulated petitions and all the professors wrote big essays on why Dylan should get the Nobel Prize and then it did happen, well, I listened

to Bob Dylan to get away from stuff like the Nobel Prize. But if you're going to do it, then do it right and learn the song, so you can show all the people on that committee (and all the professors and social critics) who thought it wasn't deserved why it was deserved.

On that count, the performance unfortunately failed. It's one thing if you break a string, or forget a line or fuck up a verse now and then. It happens. But in this case, it was clear on every verse, she didn't learn the song. Maybe she thought she knew it. But to me, one of the biggest no's in performing is stopping a song. I don't care who it is.

I felt embarrassment watching Patti Smith. But I will always be grateful to her for being both hip and smart enough to pick Dark Eyes as a duet on 1995 Fall Tour. It was the highlight of every night. Dylan looked so fucking young, and I know he didn't look that young. But that was in the days where he could turn and look 20 years younger and sometimes more.